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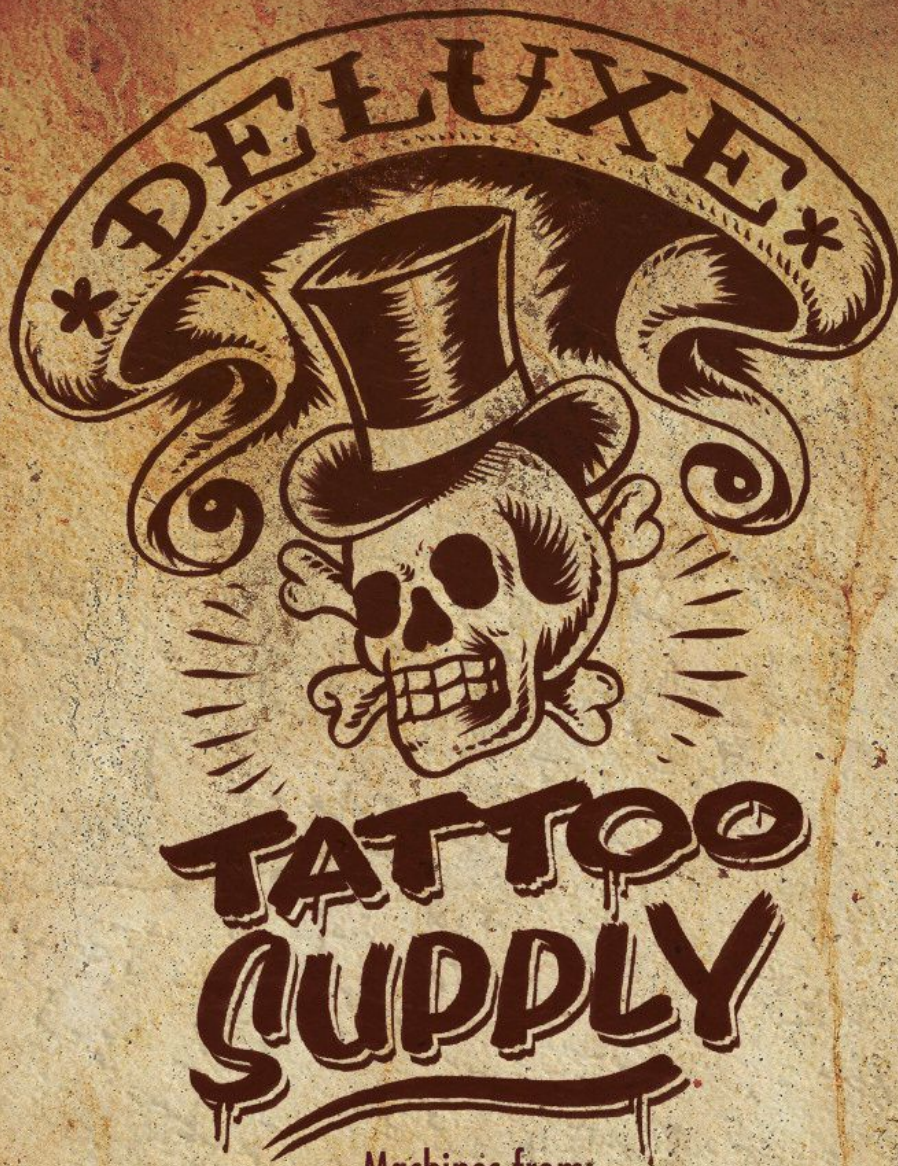
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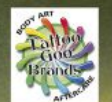
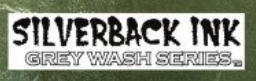


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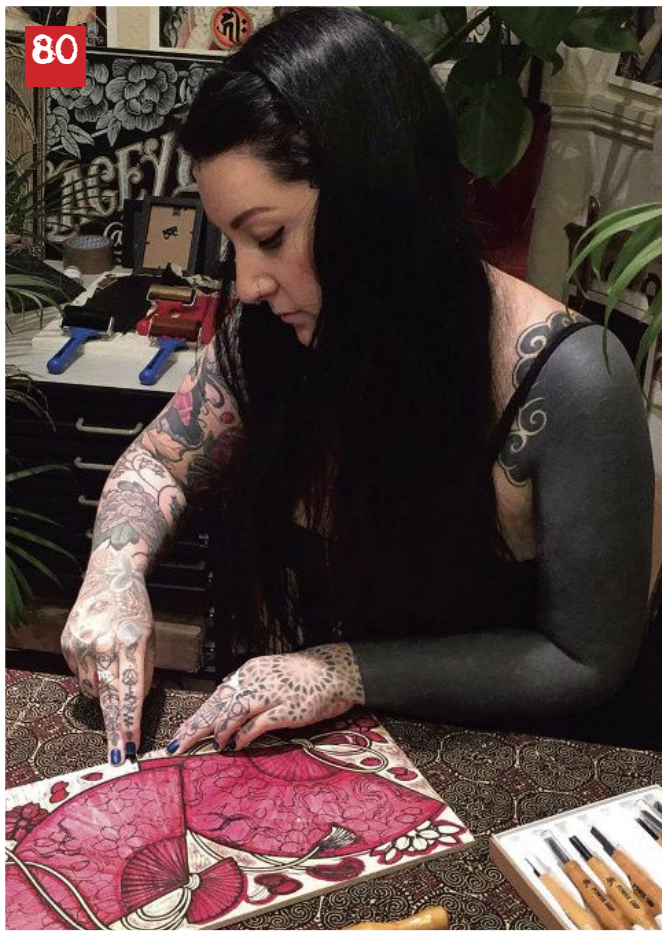
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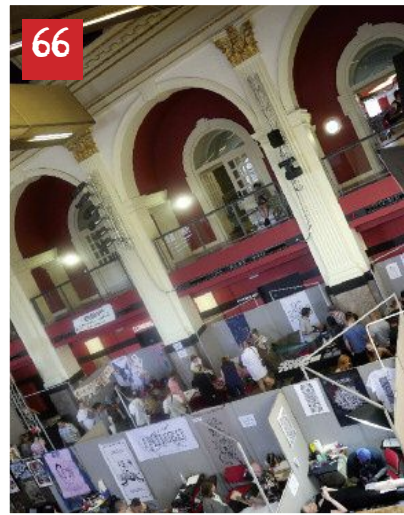
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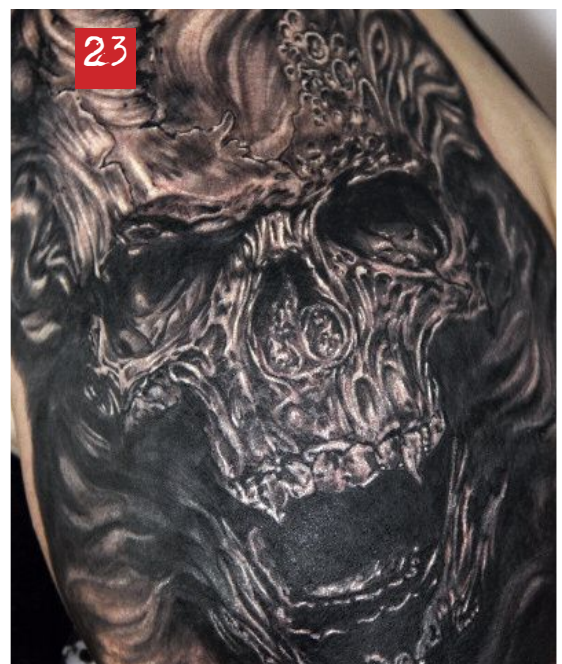


66

88



23



36



WELCOME TO ISSUE 157

- 7 **WELCOME TO ISSUE 157**
Lizzy on celebrity icons
- 8 **NEWS & REVIEWS**
All the news that's fit to print
- 14 **RUSS ABBOTT INTERVIEWED BY CLARA SINCLAIR**
Two decorative specialists get together for a chat
- 23 **BERLIN TATTOO CONVENTION**
Awesome event in a city of alternative culture
- 30 **JOAO BOSCO: SNAKES, SKULLS & THE FLOWER OF DEATH**
Joao talks to us about his exquisite new book
- 36 **ARRAN BURTON**
Contemporary Japanese tattoos... and Thai boxing!
- 44 **VERONICA BLADES**
Cover Model Profile
- 46 **GALLERY**
A fine selection of international tattoo treats
- 58 **MARIA ERIKSSON**
Vibrant creativity at King Carlos Tattoo in Stockholm
- 66 **NORWICH BODY ARTS FESTIVAL**
Back with a bang!
- 72 **DOC PRICE**
The Western world's oldest living tattooist?
- 80 **LACEY LAW**
The art of the woodblock print
- 88 **STRIKE - THE HELMET PROJECT**
Raising awareness with an exhibition of artist-customised cycle helmets
- 94 **IN FOCUS**
Tiger Bones Tattoo
- 97 **TALES FROM THE NAUGHTY STEP**
Paul Talbot wants to move things forward
- 98 **CONVENTION CALENDAR**
Get out and about

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WELCOME to 157

I've just watched an interview with Jim Carrey. It was conducted on the red carpet at the Harper's Bazaar Icons Party during New York Fashion Week, and it's a combination of bizarre and brilliant. Carrey told a journalist that he found the whole event meaningless. When the journalist pointed out that the evening was all about celebrating icons such as himself, Carrey asked if she actually believed in that kind of thing – then before she'd had a chance to answer, added that he didn't really believe she even existed...

Although the question of whether or not we exist is a very leftfield concept for most of us to think about, Jim Carrey has a point when he talks about the meaninglessness of celebrity 'icons' (even though he is himself one of them). Yes, certain people inspire us, but do they really need to be regarded as almost God-like, just for being famous?

We live in an age where you can become famous overnight thanks to the internet, reality TV and blogging. To many, it seems like a dream lifestyle. You are rich beyond your wildest imaginings and you are worshipped everywhere you go. Your worth, importance and social status are elevated to superhuman levels – and all because you won the X-Factor. The notion of celebrity has crept into every industry and scene. In fact I think many would agree that it's also become prevalent in tattooing.

Don't get me wrong. I'm not having a moan because nobody's asked me for my autograph (yet!) And I don't begrudge celebrities their fame because, let's face it, most of them have worked hard for it. What I disagree with is the preferential treatment they receive, the hero-worship, and the hysteria over everything they do. We say we 'love' these people, having never met them in person. Which, when you think about it, is very bizarre. And we perceive our idols to be so über cool and perfect that if we ever did meet them in person we'd probably feel so nervous and excited about it we'd blurt out something along the lines of "ILOVEYOUCANIHAVEAPICTUREOFUSANDTHENCANWEGETMARRIED!" then run away, crying hysterically and embarrassingly. The psychology is fascinating.

As I've got older, greyer and (hopefully) wiser, I've questioned the whole notion of 'celebrity'. I've realised that 'famous' people are actually no different to us mere mortals. They may get VIP access and priority reservations, but we all eat, breathe, shit and sleep. If it's a case of 'us versus them', I don't believe there's anything less worthy about 'us' at all. There's no need to feel less cool just because we haven't achieved fame or notoriety in the media.

And as for talking to 'celebrities'? It's definitely OK within context (for example: "Hello Nick Cave. Thank you for writing such beautiful music.") Just don't declare your undying love, present them with any presents made with bodily fluids, or touch them, OK?



Lizzy
Total Tattoo Editorial Team
editor@totaltattoo.co.uk

"If you look at the footballers, you look at our celebrity culture, we seem to be saying, 'This is the way you want to be'. We seem to be a society that celebrates all the wrong people."

– Iain Duncan Smith

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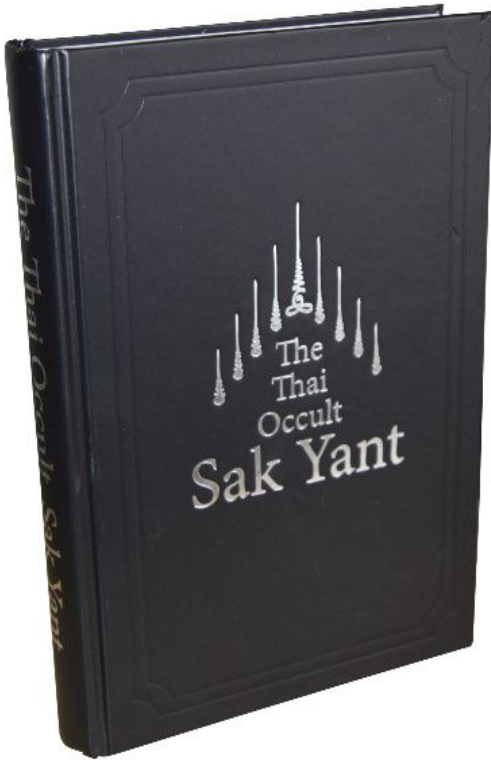
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NEWS & REVIEWS

Tattoo news and reviews for your delectation and delight. If it goes on in the tattoo world, it goes in here. Send us your news items, books or products for review and items of general curiosity and intrigue for the tattoo cognoscenti.

News, Total Tattoo Magazine, 111 Furze Road, Norwich, Norfolk, NR7 0AU

BOOK REVIEW



The Thai Occult Sak Yant

By Jenx and Ajarn Metta

Published by Timeless

Hardback, 16cm x 24cm,

silver embossed cover

Available from

www.timeless-shop.com

A wonderful in-depth guide to Thailand's sacred tattoo art: Sak Yant. This ancient practice is clearly explained, and many common misconceptions are corrected. The book includes a helpful glossary, explanations of scripts and imagery, and a compendium of Sak Yant designs. It also features interviews with nine Ajarns (Sak Yant masters), who discuss the origins of the practice and give their opinions on its modern interpretations. With its photographs, illustrations, and descriptive text, this volume is a must for anyone who wants to learn about Sak Yant – and for any armchair travellers out there who love finding out about traditional tattoos in different parts of the world.



TATTOOIN' AT THE TATTOO INN

If you venture upstairs at The Old King's Arms in Newark's Kirk Gate, you'll find The Tattoo Inn – believed by its owner to be the first tattoo studio that is actually inside a local pub. Tattooist Dawn Roberts is the partner of landlord Chris Smith, and they both have many years' experience of their respective trades. When the opportunity presented itself, it simply made business sense to share a building. As their sign says, it's 'Upstairs for inking and downstairs for drinking'. And that's the crucial thing. Both are aware that booze and tattoos are not always a good combination, and they have strict rules about customers not getting inked while under the influence. The Tattoo Inn is fully booked for the next few weeks, but they have kept some slots open for walk-ins. Check them out on Facebook.

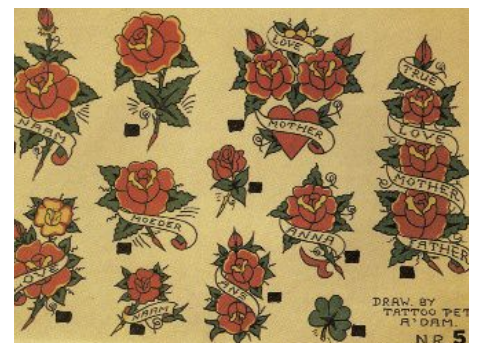


UPDATE ON TATTOO OLE



In last month's Total Tattoo, we featured a news item about the threatened closure of historic tattoo studio Tattoo Ole in Nyhavn, Copenhagen. A court date had been set, but we understand it has now been postponed. You'll find the online petition here:

www.ipetitions.com/petition/save-the-worlds-oldest-tattoo-shop



WIN A HELLCAT SKULL NECKLACE!

Hellcat is a new brand offering unique and alternative handmade jewellery and homewares. Jo Herriotts crafts wonderful curiosities, including her signature sterling silver skull jewellery for the rock 'n' roller in you! Check out her website, where you'll also find such tempting delights as rings, quirky cufflinks and tumblers, some of which Jo sources from other artists and like-minded independent businesses. Jo has spent years honing her skills since graduating from the Birmingham School of Jewellery and she also loves working with clients to make custom pieces.

To be in with a chance of winning this awesome skull necklace, simply email us the answer to the following question:

The television drama 'Hellcats' is about American college students who become what in their spare time?

- A. Cheerleaders**
- B. Priests**
- C. Vets**

Email your answer to comps@totaltattoo.co.uk by with HELLCAT in the subject line. Closing date is November 15th and usual terms and conditions apply (see p5).

For more information about Hellcat jewellery and homewares, check out www.hellcatjewellery.co.uk or email jo@hellcatjewellery.co.uk



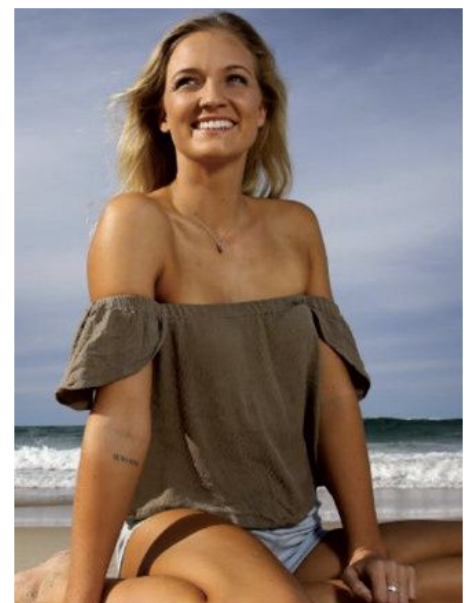
THANK GRAYSON IT'S FRIDAY



The Grayson Gallery, an inspirational community arts centre in Grayson, Kentucky, USA, has become known for its Final Friday events – with art for sale, live music and refreshments on the last Friday of every month. August's Final Friday was called 'The Art of Tattoo'. As the invitation on the gallery's Facebook page read, "The heat is ON! Bring a friend and show whatcha got!" The post went on, "We've been asked... 'What is this Tattoo show thing?' WELL! In addition to over a dozen talented artists exhibiting 40-plus original pieces of tattoo-genre works, LIVE persons who want to show-off their tats are eligible for a special \$50 cash prize as well!! C'mon out, show yo'self and have some fun." There was art in many different media – including watercolours, oils, pencil sketches and photographs – the only criterion being that everything on show should be by a tattooist or have a tattoo theme. There were awards, including the Gallery Board Choice and the People's Choice (both of which were won by Jame Hutchinson's 'Geisha') and Rebecca Dearfield won the cash prize for Best Tats of the Evening. Visit the Grayson Gallery on Facebook, in person at 301 Third Street, Grayson, KY, or call +1 (606) 474 7651.

FALLING IN LOVE WITH LIFE

Our news radar has picked up the story of Australian Emma Carey, who has a very special tattoo. It marks the date (in Roman numerals) when her previous life ended and her new life began – or, as she calls it, her 're-birthday', the day she realised she was in love with life. Emma was doing a tandem skydive high above the Alps in Switzerland when both the main parachute and the safety chute became caught around her instructor's neck. He lost consciousness and the two of them plummeted to the ground. Falling to what she assumed would be her death, Emma instead hit the ground alive... but a few nightmare moments later found that she was paralysed from the waist down. It was a long and arduous road to recovery, but she astounded everyone by learning to walk again and shared her journey through her inspirational blog. "My broken heart became my greatest strength, my paralysed legs learnt to walk again and the worst moment of my life became the best thing that could have ever happened to me," she writes in one post. Perhaps understandably, a lot of people thought it odd that she wanted a tattoo of the date of her accident – but she sees the tattoo as a gentle reminder to herself that each day is a blessing. She says, "My only regret is that it took me nearly dying to open my eyes and change my life. I don't think we should have to go through something so traumatic just to realise the beauty around us... There is so much happiness waiting for you, there is so much more good in the world than bad and there is so much light after darkness..." Take a look at Emma's website, 'The Girl Who Fell From The Sky', www.emcarey.com



TATTOO THEFTS

We've heard two very sad stories recently about thefts of equipment from tattoo studios. Shelley Williams of **The Caged Fox** posted, "My FK Irons Spektra Halo 2 was stolen from my workstation. The police have been brilliant, but unfortunately my machine is still missing and I am heartbroken. I as asking if people can keep an eye out for it. I use it everyday and I am devastated that it's gone." And **Revolution Tattoos** messaged to say their studio had been broken into, with the loss of inks, tattoo machines and computer equipment – meaning that they were unable to work until replacements were found. In the aftermath, Revolution's Damian Cain told us, "It's been amazing to hear from clients and family with messages of support, offering help both practically and financially, along with best wishes and expressions of anger and disgust following my beloved Revolution being fucked over. Almost more amazing, though, was the nigh-on overwhelming outpouring of anger from the tattoo community at large – from artists in the UK, Europe, the US and Australia – and, more positively, offers of loans and donations of equipment and all manner of other help. Notably, it was also nice to hear from local studios. While rivalries may exist it's heartening to know that the community pulls together when someone is in trouble. It's been fucking horrendous – a mixture of anger, despair, worry beyond belief and a nasty feeling of violation – but everyone who has commented or contacted us has made a shit situation a little easier to bear. Thank you guys, you know who you are."

SCARS BEHIND BEAUTY

We've been hearing a number of heartwarming stories about tattooists generously offering their time and skills to help those with unwanted physical scars. These scars can often be a real hindrance to a person's emotional recovery. Dublin tattooist Ryan Sean Kelly recently launched the Scars Behind Beauty project, offering free tattoos to those who've struggled with self-harm and wish to get their scars covered. He acknowledges that many tattooists prefer not to tattoo scarred skin, and explains that these tattoos can often take longer to do, but says that it means a lot to him to be able to help someone move on from a difficult or dark time – and for him, that is the reward. He now has a huge waiting list of potential clients. Email ryanseanstephenkelly@gmail.com

We would love to hear from other artists who are also offering this kind of service.



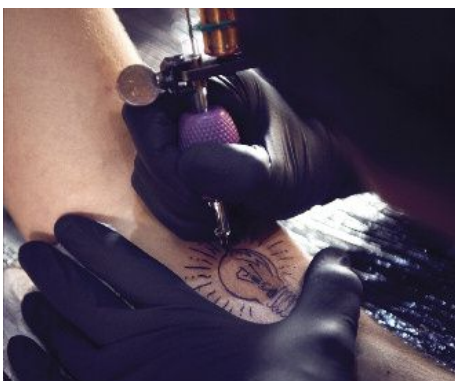
TOTAL TATTOO AND THE BIG NORTH TATTOO SHOW ON INSTAGRAM



Check out pictures from our first tattoo convention on instagram at [@totaltattoo](https://www.instagram.com/totaltattoo) and [@bignorthtattooshow](https://www.instagram.com/bignorthtattooshow)
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FEELING THE ENERGY AT BESTIVAL

Jay and Sketch from E4's 'Tattoo Fixers' teamed up with Maya Jama to offer a rather unusual tattoo experience at this year's Bestival in Lulworth Cover, Dorset. In a publicity stunt aimed at educating people about the energy-saving benefits of smart meters – which allow you to see your energy usage in pounds and pence and avoid the need for estimated bills – their pop-up tattoo studio restricted itself to using just 10p worth of electricity. With that seemingly tiny amount, they managed to tattoo five people... plus an unfortunate sixth person who was only halfway through their tattoo when the power ran out. And they made a few cups of tea as well. Tattoo designs on offer included a light bulb (very appropriately), an anchor, a bee and a lightning bolt. Laura Warby, who ended up with the half-finished tattoo (which Jay and Sketch will of course finish for her), was very happy. "I've got a great story to tell," she said in a press interview, "and I'll also be calling my energy supplier to get a smart meter. It's definitely made me think."



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RUSSELL ABBOTT

Interviewed by Clara Sinclair





Clara Sinclair



In the wake of Décoratif 2017 at Off The Map Tattoo (in Grant's Pass, Oregon, USA), Russ Abbott and Clara Sinclair got together for a chat. Inspired by the weekend's seminars and collaborations on ornamental/decorative tattooing, they talked about digital design, the pain and pleasure of tattooing, and the 10th anniversary of Russ's studio, Ink & Dagger in Atlanta, Georgia.

Clara: What was your overall impression of Décoratif 2017?

Russ: I heard the words 'inspiring' and 'amazing' getting thrown around a lot during that weekend. I was pretty overwhelmed by the whole experience.

Clara: You are known for your ornamental work. How did it feel, getting together for a weekend with tattooers who work in the same genre but with very different styles?

Russ: It was a very positive experience. A large part of my tattoo style is based around ornamental scrollwork and I also do three-dimensional geometric colour tattoos. You and Laura Jade do some very similar shapes in your designs to me, but other artists do different things. It was really cool seeing people who have explored the same style tackling projects as a collaboration. I learned a lot from seeing how other tattooers solved the same problems I was trying to solve.

Clara: Tell us more about the event.

Russ: It was awesome. We had about thirty attendees who came and spent a couple of days in Grants Pass, Oregon, participating in seminars, drawing on live models with Sharpies, and watching tattoo collaborations. There were seminars by Jeff Gogué, Laura Jade and myself, and tattoo collaborations involving the three of us plus Clinton Lee and Savannah Colleen from my shop, Matt Matik, and you of course!

Clara: And Jeff premiered his brand new documentary, *Surrender*.

Russ: Yes, that was totally unexpected. We were the first people to see it. It was one of the highlights of the weekend.



Clara: What did you think of the film?

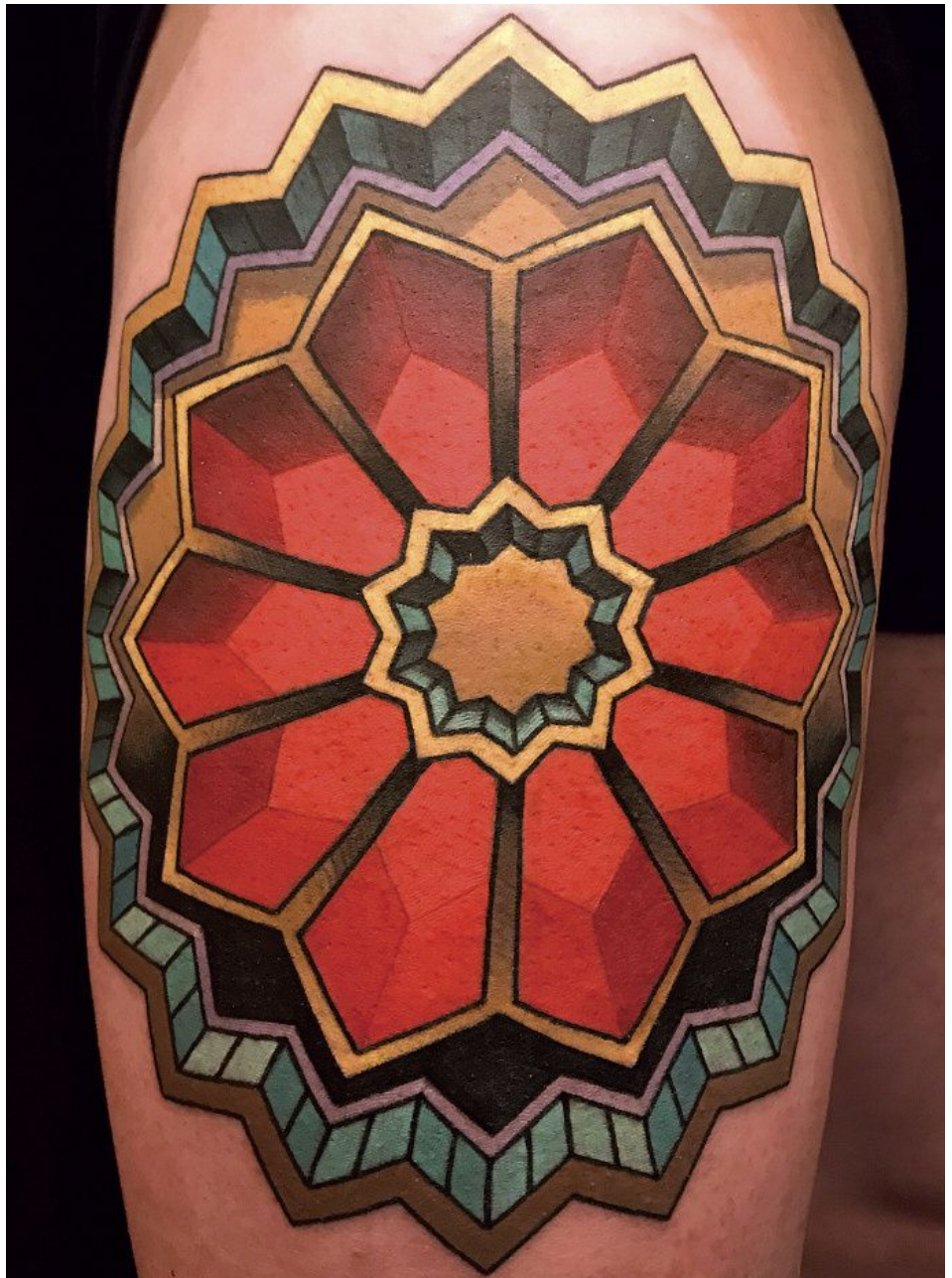
Russ: Well, let me put it this way – I think every potential tattoo client should watch it before they get tattooed. I told Clinton and Savannah that we were going to make it required viewing for all our clients at Ink & Dagger. And I was only half joking when I said that! The film teaches you a perspective on collecting tattoos that's all about enduring the pain and accepting the outcome. It shows Jeff travelling to Japan to collect a backpiece from Shige. Jeff struggled with the design that Shige created for him, and he also struggled with the pain of getting tattooed. You see all that in the film, but ultimately you also see him accepting the pain and surrendering to it. That's something that's really been on my mind lately, because I'm just about to start a big tattoo from Jeff. (Hopefully I'll have made it through by the time this interview appears in print!)

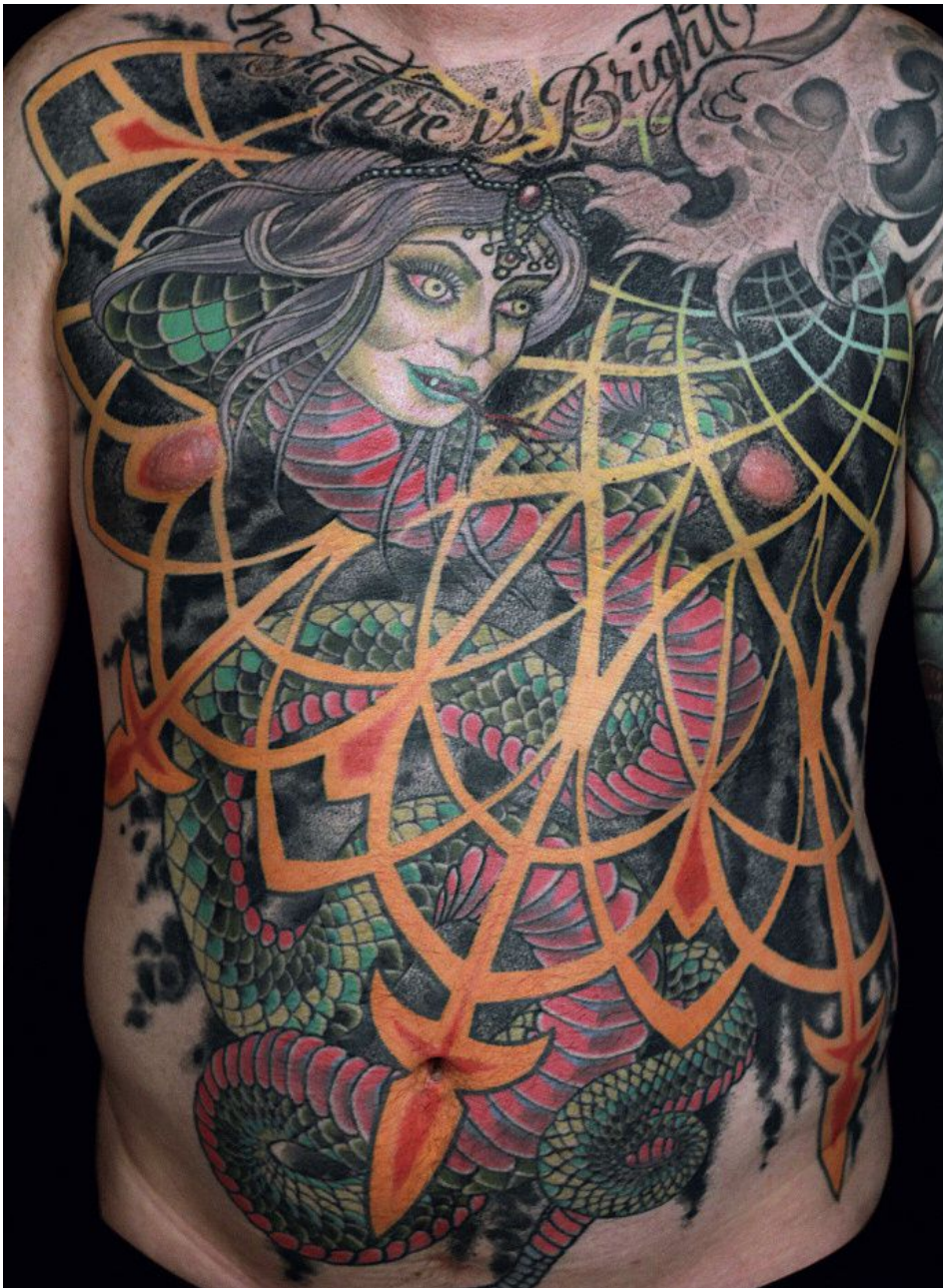
Clara: Did Jeff's film affect the way you approached the tattoo?

Russ: Yes, it did. It's interesting, because I'd given Jeff a few loose ideas but after watching his film I felt I didn't want to try to control how the finished artwork would look. For me, it's become an exercise in accepting the fact that I've chosen an artist I admire and told him where I want the tattoo... and I'll get what I get. I wish more tattoo clients would collect that way. I always like it when people send me a few pictures of work I've done that they enjoy, tell me where on their body they want the tattoo... then step back and let me create something special for them.

Clara: Does the creative process work better for you when you are given a free rein?

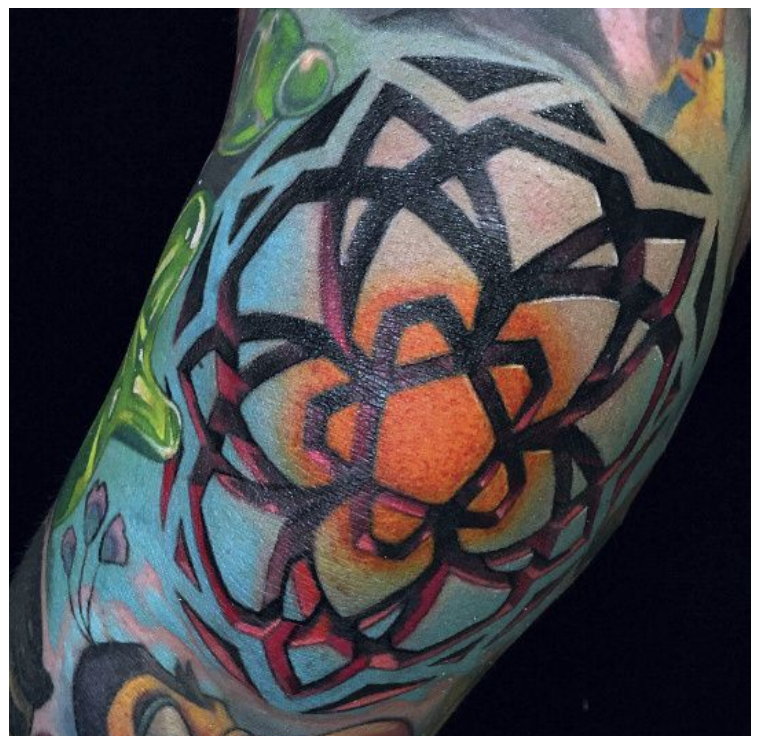
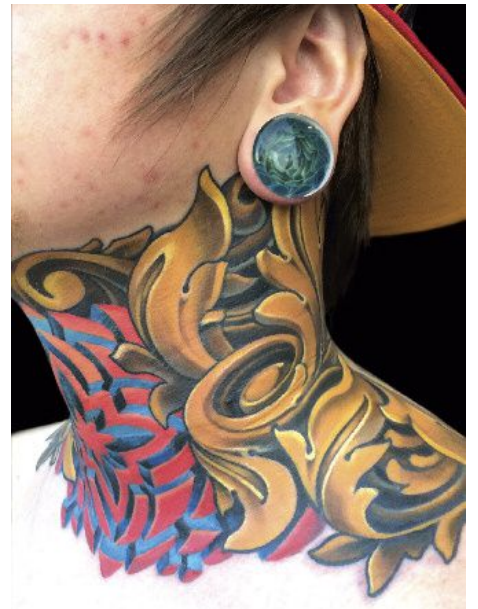
Russ: I don't like to have total artistic freedom, because then I don't know what to do. I do too many different styles and types of subject matter for that. I like to work with some creative constraints. But I don't want to have my thoughts on what should be done second-guessed too much because that takes all the energy out of the piece and makes it really stressful.





Clara: How do you see your work developing from here?

Russ: I'm really focusing on large-scale work now. I'm working on forming a bunch of designs for full bodysuits that are going to inspire the next Russ Abbott collectors to go big! After nearly twenty years of tattooing it feels important to start working on bodysuits. I've done more sleeves than I can count, and I've done a good few backpieces, full legs and full ribs, but I haven't had any entire bodysuits that were planned that way from the start. That's the kind of thing I want to be saving my time for. It's not easy to find a collector who is ready to have their whole body tattooed by one artist, but I'm trying to connect with the right people. I'll continue to do ornamental scrollwork and geometric designs, and I'll carry on doing the illustrative style that I'm known for, but things will become simpler and bolder, and you'll start to see an overall increase in scale.



by Clara



Clara: Talking of design, tell us about Tattoo Smart Digital Palettes...

Russ: A few years ago I started doing all my tattoo designs digitally. I use a Wacom Cintiq, which allows me to basically draw directly onto the computer screen, and a software package called Clip Studio Paint. I wanted to create a website to teach other tattooers how to use this software and I also wanted to offer various tattoo-related plug-ins that I've been developing. Tattoo Smart's Digital Palettes give tattooers a true digital representation of the actual ink colours that they use. We have six different tattoo ink brands that we've colour-matched with swatches. We also have digital brushes. The most popular are the accurately-sized 'tattoo needle' brushes which are very helpful because they enable you to make the outlines in your digital design exactly the same size as the tattoo needle you plan on using. And we have all kinds of crazy brushes that draw things like snake scales, rope, chain, etc. We even have a set of 'henna brushes' that make it easy to draw henna-type patterns. It's hard to explain in words, but if people want to head to tattoosmart.com they can check out what we've got going on over there.



by Clara

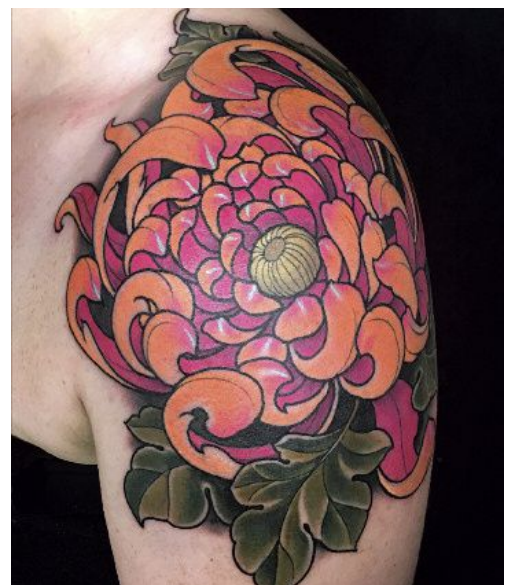


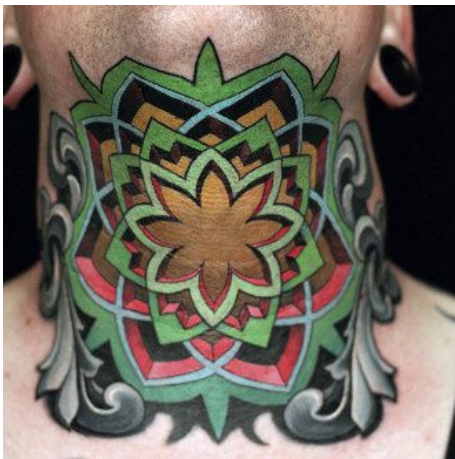
Clara: You've recently arrived at an important personal milestone – Ink & Dagger's tenth anniversary.

Russ: Yes, that was at the end of April. I decided to have a huge all-day party to celebrate because we haven't had a big party at the shop in quite a while. So I got a bunch of guest artists to come along, and we just went all out. We set up a stage and had some bands play, and we had circus performers walking round on stilts and juggling. We also had our barbecue team, Oink & Dagger, cooking wings and pork for us.

Clara: And of course the famous One Shot Wall.

Russ: Yes, the One Shot Wall is this thing we do at Ink & Dagger where we cover a wall in original new designs from our artists – so people can be the first to see those designs, and if there's anything they like they can leave a deposit on it to get it tattooed later. We had so many people there, trying to pick out designs, it was almost impossible to see the wall!



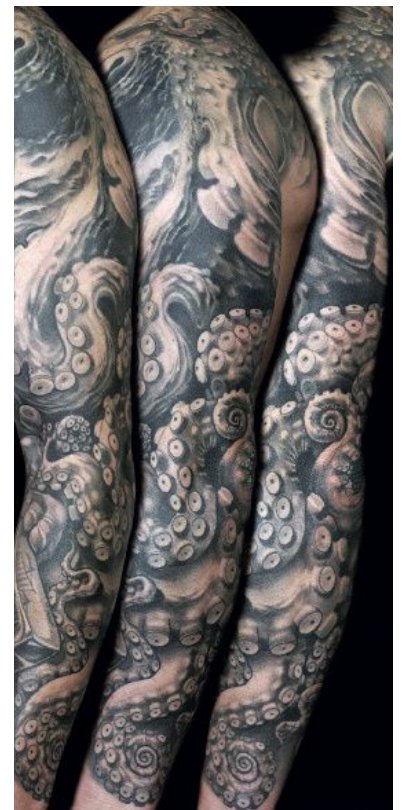


Clara: The party was a celebration of tattooers who are currently at the shop, and also those who have passed through the shop...

Russ: Yes, we had a number of people who have worked with us in the past come back and celebrate with us. Kelly Dodie came down from her shop in Salem, Massachusetts, and Joe Capobianco came down from Hope Gallery in Newhaven, Connecticut, and there was also Killian Moon, yourself... So many wonderful artists! And of course our three new resident artists were there too – Keoki, who does Polynesian-style tattoos, Izzy, who is a super all-rounder, and Wes Harland, who does amazing Japanese and neo-traditional work.

Clara: So your newly expanded shop premises were finished just in time.

Russ: Well it's still not totally done. It was really down to the wire because we had to have it open for the party. We needed the space because of the guest artists who were working at the same time as our crew, and we had to make sure there were enough stations. It was literally like the very day before the party when the City gave us permission to work out of there. But I haven't really been able to finish up the last details, because ever since the party I've been travelling, doing the Hell City Tattoo Festival and Décoratif...



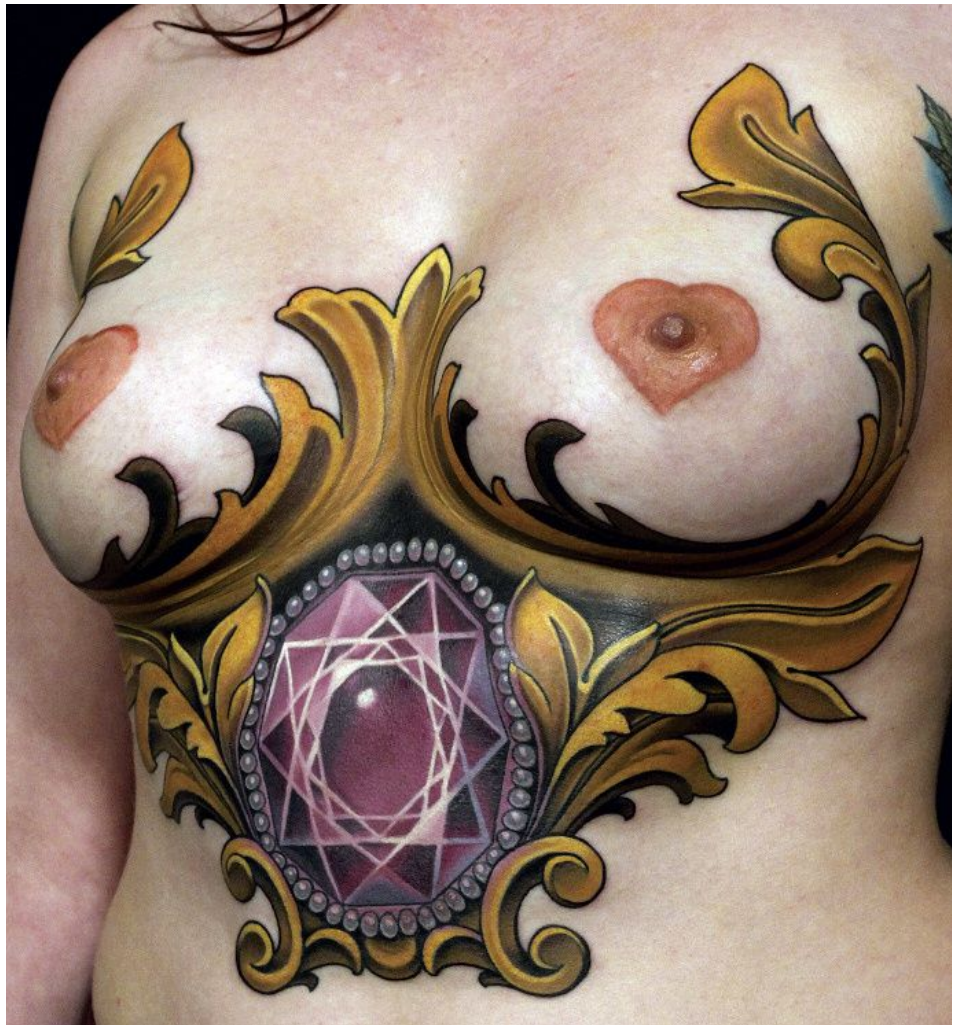


Clara: So Ink & Dagger is growing.

Russ: With the expansion, we pretty much doubled the size of the shop. I'm so excited. It's got a main entrance facing the street, which is going to help with the walk-in traffic. It's like Ink & Dagger is getting ready to explode into a bigger, more elaborate version of itself. I'm really enjoying designing the space and filling it with my favourite things. I'd run out of space, but now I get to start collecting things again. But although I'm eager to get more stuff – original art, etc – I don't want to get it so quickly that it's not 'right'.

Clara: Are you going away again any time soon?

Russ: I don't have any travel plans at the moment. Earlier this year I had an insane five straight months of travel. I did a lot of shows. It was my first time doing Milan (which was really busy) and I'd love to go back there next year. But right now, I'm looking forward to being home for a while and spending more time in my shop. With our three new resident artists it's a full house, and I'm seeing some really cool work being done. But I'm sure it won't be long before I start thinking about travelling again. There's a few events on the US calendar at the end of the year, and I'd like to do more overseas travelling too – guest spots and conventions – but I want to make sure I don't spread myself too thin. It's so easy for people to fly to Atlanta, where my shop is! It's a great place to get tattooed and be a tourist at the same time.



Clara: Anything else you'd like to say before we finish?

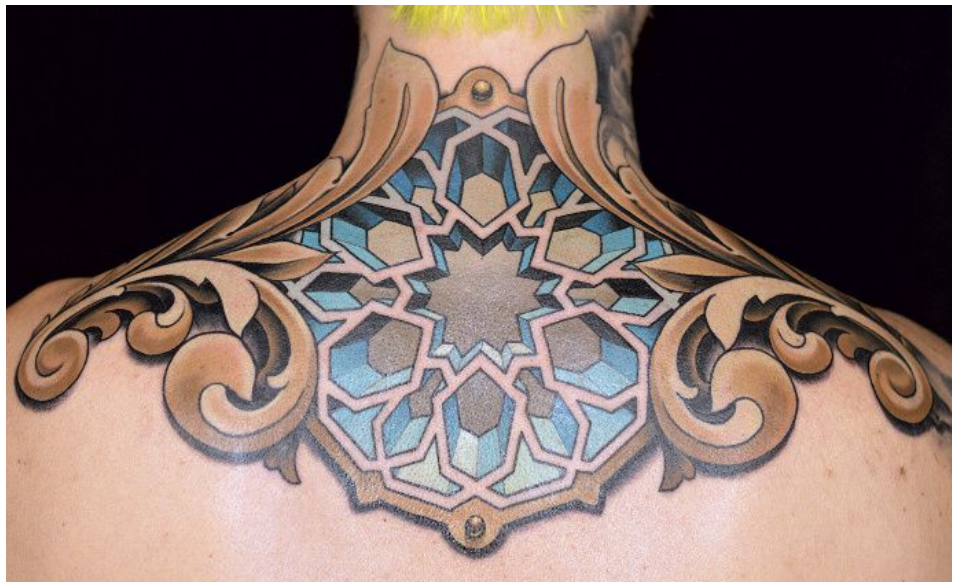
Russ: I'd like to thank my crew at the shop for being so wonderful and for making Ink & Dagger such an exciting and fulfilling place in which to tattoo. And I'd like to thank our clients as well. We have the best clients! They just 'get it', and are all about collecting great tattoos and letting us make a living making artwork for them. It's a pretty amazing craft to dedicate your life to; and whether you're an artist or a collector (or both), tattooing is at a peak right now. I guess the question is whether it's possible for it to get any better because it's so crazy how far it's come. It's cool to see that, and to be a part of it.

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BERLIN TATTOO CONVENTION

Berlin is a fantastic city full of history, art, culture and nightlife. It's therefore no wonder that the Tattoo Convention Berlin has remained a success for the last twenty seven years. 2017's show was no exception.

Pre-2013, the convention was held in December. Having visited Berlin in the winter, I think it's safe to say that the change to summer was a welcome one! Although August in the city can be very hot, it's a more comfortable temperature for showing off tattoos and a more relaxing time for visiting in general. There's definitely a slower pace of life as people take time to enjoy the street art that engulfs Berlin, pause to admire the impressive architecture, or stop by one of the many Biergartens for a refreshing cool beer.

The venue, Arena Berlin, is located in the Treptow area of the city, near the river Spree. It's a short walk from the super cool Kreuzberg district, with nearby U-Bahn and transport links to the rest of the city. It's also next to a series of outdoor bars and a swimming pool that overlooks the river. Inside, the venue is dark, yet open and roomy. For the convention, the main stage was located at the back and the side doors were opened up to accommodate bars, food stalls and a smaller stage for entertainment – all with breathtaking views of the river and city. Day tickets started at €19, or €38 for the three days, with the proceedings kicking off at 2pm on the Friday and 11am over the weekend, and finishing at midnight on both the Friday and the Saturday.

The convention showcased the talents of around 230 artists from Germany and the rest of the world, with styles ranging from avant garde and realism to Japanese and everything in between. The public and the judges were treated to a display of incredible tattoos during the competitions. Thankfully, the sixteen categories were spread over the three evenings, which kept visitors intrigued and the entries fresh.

- 1. graffiti on the streets of berlin
- 2. aidan o'brien, dragons forge
- 3. elen soul, zarenwerk tattoo (germany)
- 4. aero, inkeaters tattoo studio (bulgaria)





There was a variety of entertainment on offer including live music, an Amy Winehouse tribute act, Shibari, art fusion projects, and a Tattoo Queen contest. It was also great to see the historical tattoo artefacts brought over from Liverpool by Willy Robinson. Another amazing treat was the HR Giger exhibition, which featured an original sculpture as well as art and merchandise that was available to buy. Combined with an eclectic mix of jewellery and clothing stalls, there was enough temptation here to prise open even the tightest of purse strings.

After 27 years, it's obvious that the Berlin convention has established a firm place for itself in the city's annual events schedule. The challenge with such a long-running show is knowing how to keep the public coming back year after year. But it seems that organiser Frank Weber has hit on the perfect formula, with the right combination of artists, exhibitions and entertainment, and is set to make 2018's convention just as successful.



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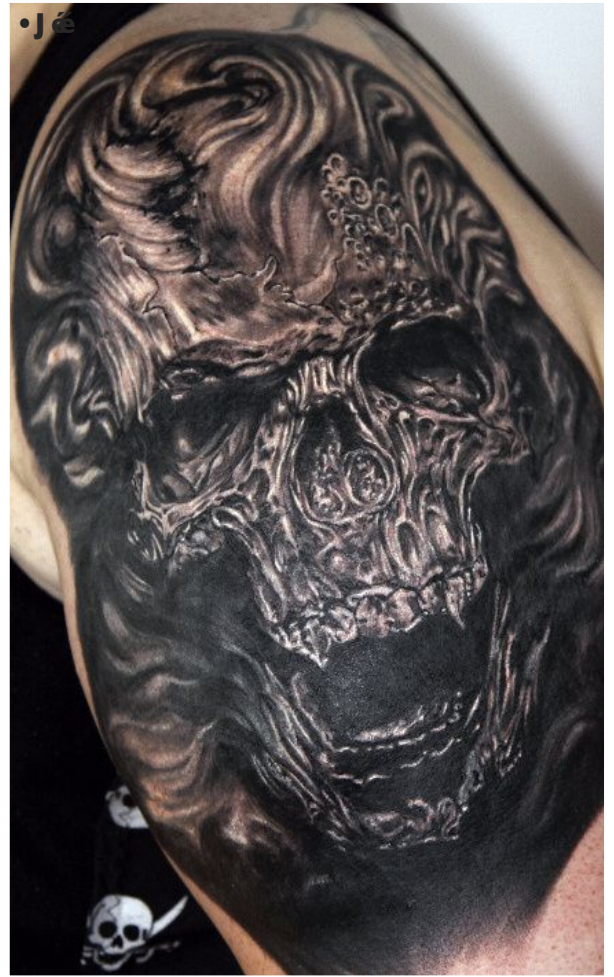


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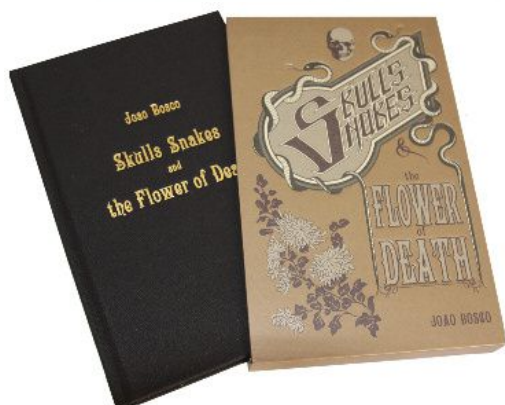
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JOAO BOSCO TIGER SWORD

Tattooist Joao Bosco has recently produced a beautiful new book, an exquisite collection of skulls, snakes and chrysanthemums. We talked to him about the ideas behind his images, and why he'd decided to publish the book himself.



Tell us about Tiger Sword.

Tiger Sword is my new enterprise. I decided to set up my own publishing company and publish my own material – and I want to help other artists in the future to have their art documented and published too. My main influence for this project was the enormous quality and success of my 2016 *Genesis* book, published by Tattoo Life and Miki Vialetto. One of Miki's strengths is his incredible attention to detail, and that's what made me realise that good presentation is as important as great content when it comes to art books. I learnt a lot through self-publishing this book. The process was way harder than I'd expected, but very exciting at the same time.

Why did you decide to put this collection together in book form?

My main drive was *Genesis*. That book made me understand how I wanted to present myself to the world. But more than that, I feel that a book can document an artist's journey through life, and preserve a record for the next generation. Nowadays, tattoos and tattoo artists' drawings are being exclusively promoted on social media. If the internet disappeared tomorrow, all the art of all artists in the world would fall into oblivion. I don't believe virtual platforms like Instagram and Facebook will be there forever. I see books as a more permanent record.

What are your hopes for this book?

I want to be able to look at it in ten years' time and feel proud, and I want it to influence people too, in the way that I have been influenced by other books.



Are you worried that some of the designs will be copied and used as flash?

No, not at all. I'm simply giving back to the world what I've taken from it! I didn't create anything that you see in this book; they're just my versions of subjects that were already there way before me. You can't reinvent the wheel.

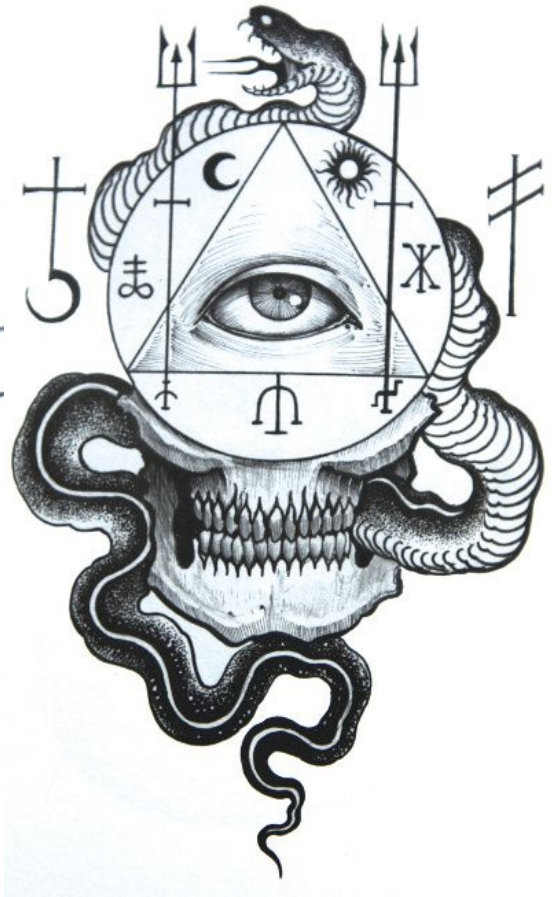
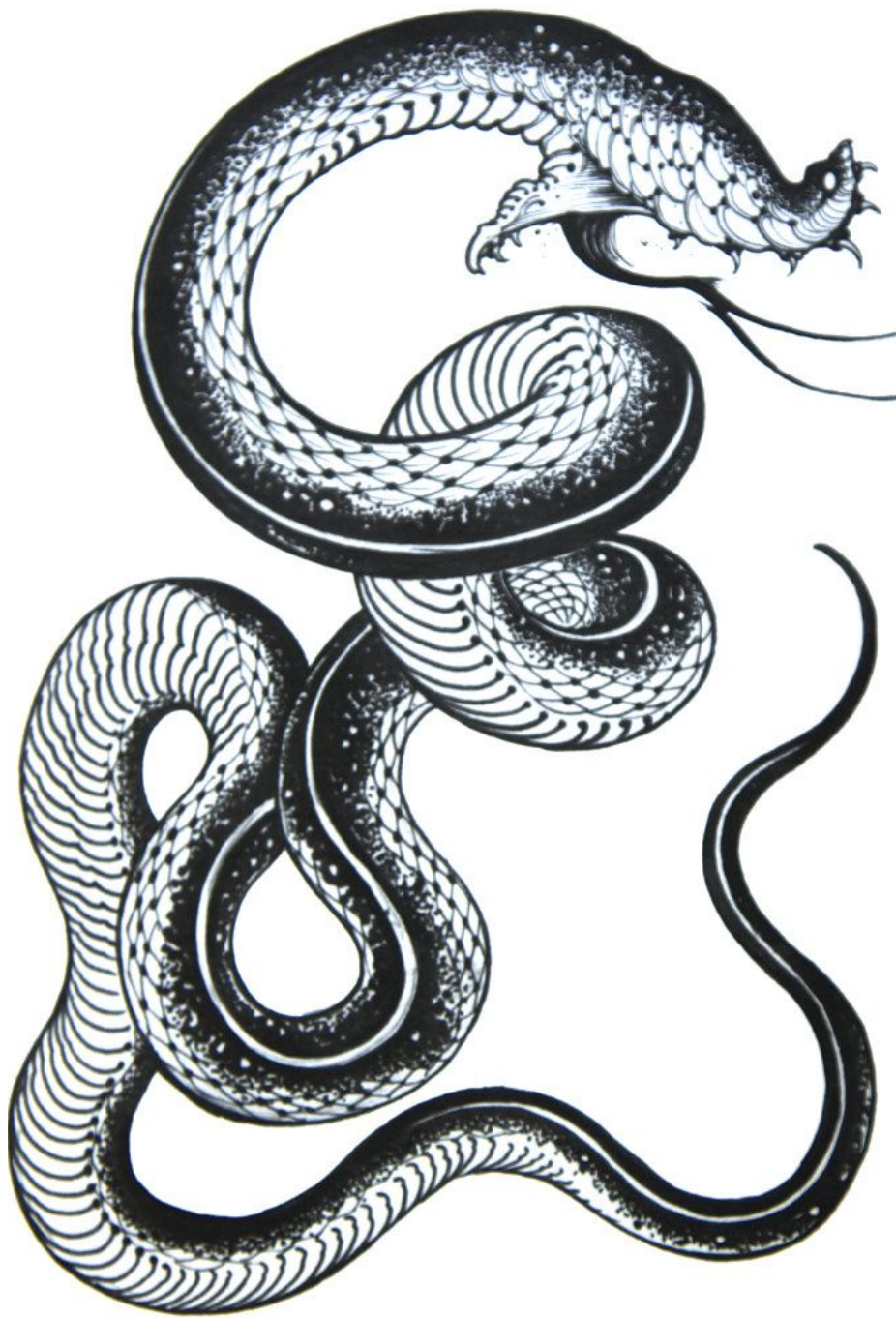
Your drawing style and tattoo style translate really well. How much does one influence the other?

I've been drawing since I was a kid. I was very much into comic books, but comic book illustrations and tattoos are very different. I had to re-learn how to draw, pretty much from scratch. I truly believe that designs for tattoos have to be crafted specifically for the purpose, because creating art for the human body is different to anything else. There's so much you have to take into consideration. I had to re-shape my skills and creative perceptions to fit the tattoo art form, and tattoos made me the artist that I am now. But then again, what do I know?

What is it about art that is so important to you?

I don't even know how to define 'art'! Sometimes I feel like I'm a teenager having sex for the first time... I don't have a clue what I'm doing, but it's still exciting and it feels good!





The book focuses on just three subjects. Did you find it difficult to come up with original images again and again?

Oh yes, it was very difficult. Sometimes, when I'd run out of ideas, I felt like I was trapped in the corner of a room with nowhere to go. I had to really squeeze my brain to get just one more image out... But inspiration only catches you while you're working hard and sweating!

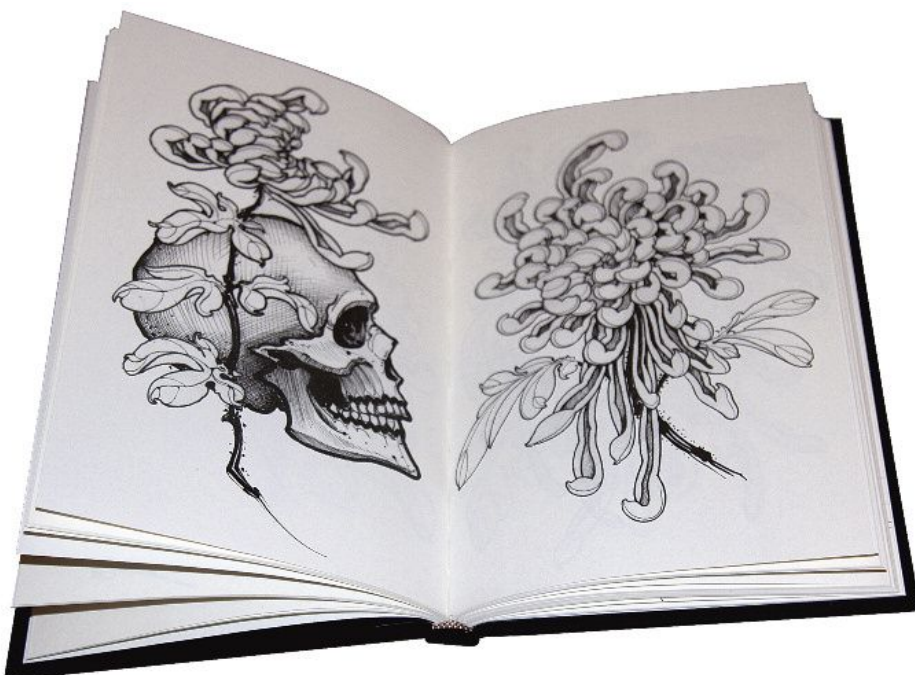
That's something that completely fascinates me. It's the pain that sparks it, I guess, and that's a good feeling.

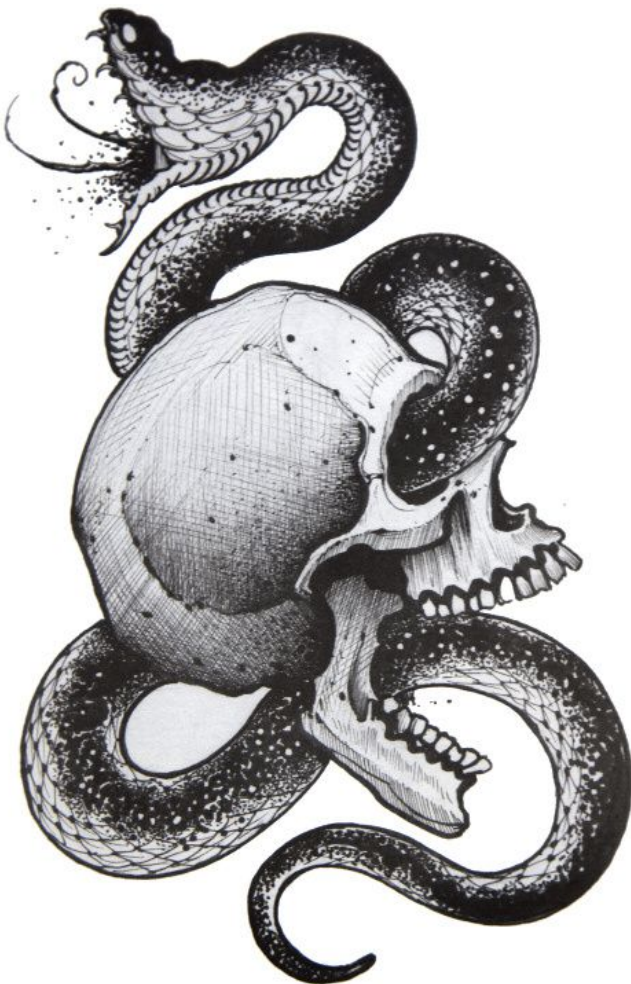
Why skulls, snakes and chrysanthemums?

Skulls represent us – humanity. Our longevity as well as our mortality. Snakes represent the spiritual side of things that has always been there (until recently, perhaps) – God, the devil, faith, the soul... whatever you want to call anything that isn't material and isn't mortal. And Chrysanthemums? Well I see them as the link between flesh and spirit. The bridge that connect humans with that spiritual world.

You created the book over the course of one summer. How hard was it to remain so disciplined?

Very hard. *[Laughs]* I missed out on a lot of fun and a lot of parties! But it goes without saying that it paid off in the end, and I would happily do it all over again. And very likely I will...





Did the finished book live up to your expectations?

My vision of the book was a little bit blurry in the beginning, but towards the end I could see more clearly how things should be done. Overall, the outcome was so much better than what I'd originally envisaged. And what excites me the most is knowing that I have so much more to learn with the next projects that I'm planning to do.

How has the book been received?

I've been surprised how good the feedback has been. I didn't expect it at all. We had book launches in London and Sao Paulo, and they were both terrific. People showed so much love and support. It was really emotional. We screened a short film which was produced by Autobahn, a London-based film production company. They're second to none, those guys. They did an amazing job. [See link at end of interview – ed.]

Any plans for further books in the future?

This project has filled me with so much drive and inspiration, I simply have to do a sequel – plus other book-related projects too. I'm extremely excited. The horizon is bright!

To view the short film about Joao's book, visit autobahnlondon.com

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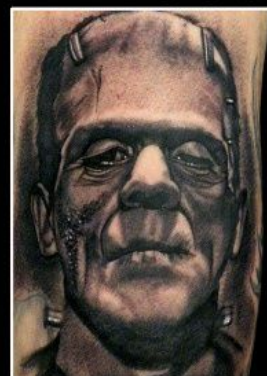
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Sitting down for a chat with Arran Burton was long overdue and an absolute pleasure. As an artist, Arran has never really drawn attention to himself. He's just kept his head down and got on with it, and he's come a long way in the last ten years. His work ethic is second to none and his contemporary interpretation of Japanese style, with its distinctive colour palette and subtle humour, has brought him to the attention of tattoo collectors and tattoo artists alike.

Arran Burton



From early childhood, anything that fuelled Arran's imagination inspired him to draw. "I'd be watching *The Dark Crystal* or something like that and I'd have to try to draw it - obviously terribly, because I was only five or six. But I just found drawing exciting. Mostly I'd create slightly weird things. My mum has kept some of my drawings, and she showed me them the other day. Hedgehogs with machine guns and parachutes... Stuff like that."



While the other kids were off playing football, Arran would be drawing. "For Christmas and birthday presents, all I wanted was anything to do with art," he recalls. His mother was working at a National Trust field study centre that happened to offer art tuition, so instead of arranging childcare for Arran, she would just book him onto a course. That was where he learned to draw animals so well, which in turn led to his obsession with mythical creatures and imaginary beasts.





On leaving school, Arran didn't feel particularly attracted to any of the conventional creative career paths. Jobs in architecture, graphic design, advertising, etc, just didn't tick all the boxes for a man who only loved to draw – and they usually required further study, which simply didn't interest him. In the end, he became an apprentice printer, and drawing was relegated to being a “pleasurable pastime”. It seemed like a compromise he could live with... but then he discovered tattoos.

Tattoo magazines were the keys to the magic kingdom. “I hadn't realised tattoo magazines even existed,” he told me. “It was like a whole new world. All these images that I loved, all in one place... Brilliant. I used to buy them in bulk from a guy at Felixstowe market. I'd get back issues for a quid, or maybe ten for a fiver. Then I'd just sit down and try to draw everything I saw.” But despite what seems like an obvious connection now, Arran just didn't join up the dots. “At that time, I never thought that I could be a tattooist. It just didn't occur to me.”



Even when his friends started pushing him towards it, he still felt uneasy. “There's that unspoken code: You get taught by someone, you don't just start up on your own. Tattooing's a real big thing. It's surgical! I didn't feel it was something I could just mess about with. And ten years ago it was hard to get into tattooing if you didn't know any artists personally. For me, the idea of being a tattooist was like a dream. Other people did it. Not me.”





Then a heavily tattooed friend of Arran's told him that he drew flash and sold it to a tattooist. That set Arran thinking. "I was like, what? They buy your drawings off you? How come they don't do their own?"

Around that time, Arran saw some pictures of tattoos by Leigh Oldcorn of Cosmic Tattoo in Colchester. He loved them. Discovering that Cosmic was actually not very far from where he lived, he decided to head over there and maybe get some work done. And that was where his whole experience of tattooing changed. "All my tattoos up to that point were like, 'Oh my God, the pain is ridiculous!' and I would be sweating and gritting my teeth from start to finish. It was an absolute nightmare which you just about survived. Excruciating. You never wanted to go back." But getting tattooed by Leigh was a different matter entirely. "After the first couple of lines he asked me if it was OK. It was unbelievable how pain-free the experience was, in comparison to what I'd known previously. It was such a relief. And the work was about a thousand percent better."





Leigh and Arran hit it off right away. Leigh did a sleeve for him, and sorted out some of his not-so-great work. Arran brought in some of the images he wanted tattooed (always Asian) and he even did the line drawings. But in two years of getting tattooed by him, Arran never actually mentioned to Leigh that he was an artist. He was determined not to be "the guy who says, 'Look at my drawings, look at my drawings...!' and keeps pestering the tattooist."

But then he was invited to a shop do at Cosmic. "I was showing the girl who worked on the desk some pictures of my dogs," he recalls, "and when she saw the photos of my drawings, she called Leigh over for him to take a look. He asked me if I had done them myself, and then he suggested I came into the shop on Monday for a chat. All excited, I took my drawings down to the shop with absolutely no idea what it was all about! Leigh asked me to draw some stuff on the spot... then he asked me if I would like to learn to tattoo." Finally, the penny dropped.



So Arran found himself at a fork in the road of life. He was in a secure job with a good income, but he had now been offered the chance to immerse himself in his artistic passion. It was a career opportunity that came with no guarantees and it would mean starting at the bottom again. His parents did what you would expect all good parents to do; they pointed out the possible pitfalls but also said they would support their son's decision no matter what. Arran took a couple of days to think about it, but really the decision was already made.

The first person he tattooed was himself, a thing that Leigh insisted upon. Then after that he tattooed a few mates. It became obvious to Leigh that Arran had got what it takes. As with any good apprenticeship Arran started with the basics, but it didn't take him long to realise that Oriental imagery was his true



love. As he discovered more about its myriad deities and supernatural beings he was sold. But how do you attract that type of work? More good advice from Leigh: "Get drawing, and get those images out there. Show people what you can do." It worked well, and with Arran concentrating on his Japanese work it meant that Leigh was free to do even more of the B&G work for which he has become so well known.

Looking back, Arran remembers the excitement of embarking on his dream career. From the word go, he respected and revered tattooing and didn't take anything for granted (something I can still hear in his voice now, ten years down the line). As an artist, he has the gift of being very adaptable. He picks things up quickly. But it was sheer hard work and dedication that elevated his tattooing to a whole new level. From very early on, he was on our radar here at Total Tattoo Magazine as an up-and-coming artist we wanted to keep our eyes on.

Then he did something that took us all by surprise.



"Aside from tattooing, my other absolute passion is Thai Boxing," Arran tells me. "I love the rawness of it, and I was obsessed. If I wasn't drawing, I was training." Arran was already fighting competitively in the UK and travelling out to Thailand for twice-yearly training camps, but he was becoming all too aware that a fighter's life is short. "Out in Thailand, I met a few westerners who were staying there on a longer term basis, just training and fighting, and I thought how awesome that would be. It seemed like it was 'now or never'. I was starting to take longer to recover from fights. If I didn't do it real soon, I was never going to do it. I felt confident in my ability to tattoo and I was sure that I would be able to come back to tattooing, and I knew that if I didn't go to Thailand I would always regret it. In fact I had to get it out of my system so that I could completely focus on tattooing."

Arran's biggest fear was not facing the kicks and punches of his opponents but telling Leigh that he was leaving Cosmic. "Leigh had given me so much. It felt terrible having to tell him I was leaving. Thankfully he was cool with it. We decided on a six month notice period, because we figured out that in that time I could finish everything I'd started." (Another example of the way Arran does things properly!)

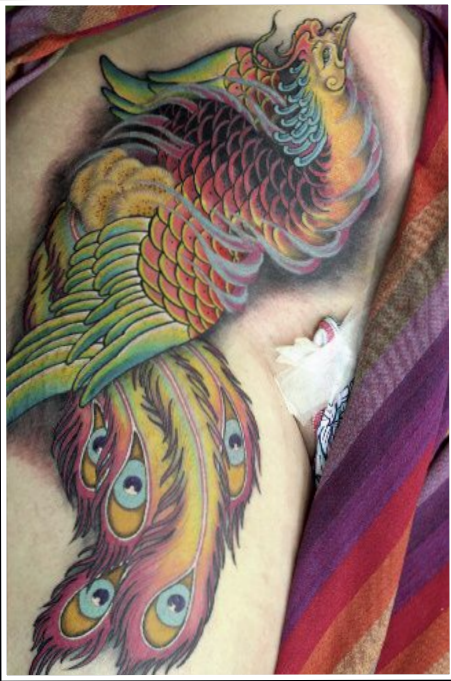


So six months later, off he flew to Thailand. "I rented a cheap apartment near the gym in Bangkok," he tells me. "I'd wake at six in the morning and go for a run with an Irish guy who was the only other western fighter training with me. Then we would head to the gym to train for three hours, come back for breakfast, sleep, then head back to the gym for some more training, come home to sleep... and so on. I absolutely loved that simple life. I earned virtually nothing and I had very little - just the bare



essentials - and it's made me really appreciate what I have now." Arran fought several times a month, depending on his injuries, and he trained six hours a day, six days a week. He fought in massive stadiums (his very first professional encounter was a bare-knuckle fight in the Thapae Boxing Stadium in Chiang Mai), small clubs and even prisons. But aged 32, and after thirty professional fights, he admits he was gradually falling to bits. So he returned home, but continued to fight in the UK for a while, eventually winning the British title in his weight. "I always said that I wanted to win that title and go out at the top," he confides. And he certainly did that.

Arran hadn't held a tattoo machine in his hands for two years, but he hadn't stopped drawing. If anything, his creativity had intensified through his total



immersion in Asian culture. The artist who returned to the UK had grown, and his work reflected that in its scale and sophistication, its layout and flow. Paradoxically, Arran's time away from the machine enabled him to make phenomenal progress in his tattooing. And his prolonged Asian sojourn gave him a different way of understanding his chosen imagery.

Arran spent some time at Cosmic on his return to the UK, but has now spread his wings. He's currently based at Fudoshin Tattoos in London and is also doing a bimonthly slot at Guil Zekri's Reinkarnation studio in Cologne, Germany. I had to ask him if he'd ever seriously dreamt of a life like this. "No, never! Leigh always said to me that once I was good at tattooing I could go anywhere in the world, but I'd always had my doubts..." Tattooing has now taken Arran all over Europe and the States. His phenomenal work ethic is matched by a respectful attitude and a deep understanding of his craft. And he's stayed true to himself and followed his heart. That's a combination that brings incredible, and often unforeseeable, rewards. In tattooing, you never know what's round the corner or where the next conversation might take you!

www.instagram.com/arranburton

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MODEL
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**VERONICA
BLADES**



Words: Matt Haddon-Reichardt
Photos: Julian Ibbitson

On our cover this month is Veronica Blades, a transgender body modification artist, model, and specialist in the controversial art of eyeball tattooing. Matt Haddon-Reichardt met up with her to find out how a shy girl from Poland transformed herself into a social media phenomenon at the forefront of the London scene.

Coming into Veronica's apartment, I feel as though I have stepped through a portal into another dimension to interview an intergalactic bounty hunter rather than a Polish body modification artist. Veronica's jet black eyes give her an alien appearance that I find utterly captivating.

"I waited until I was eighteen to get my first piercing done because I wanted it to be an adult decision," she explains, her eyes sparkling at me from across the table. "Then I got my eyes done, my horns, my implants, my tattoos... I just kept building." However, after recent gender realignment surgery, she is going through a fresh process of transformation and has removed many of the body modifications she once had. "Now I'm plain! I'm en route to redesigning myself, and I want to get a full-on tattoo bodysuit. I don't want any bullshit tattoos on me. I want a complete cohesive piece done by one artist. I have bits and pieces of ink on my face and on my fingers, but I've always wanted a bodysuit and now my gender realignment surgery is out of the way it's time to fulfil my ambition. I want it to be bio-organic, with a high level of detail and realism. I'm a blank canvas waiting to be filled."

Veronica's passion for body mods began when she watched a Disney movie and became enthralled by a character's tongue piercing. She got her own tongue pierced, caught the body mod bug in a big way, and started to practice techniques on herself and willing volunteers. She then got into it professionally, but her fledgling career was cut short when she was fired from the shop where she worked because of her sexuality. This temporary setback was, however, the catalyst for her move from Poland to the UK, where she found a home at Extreme Needle in London.

"I love London," she tells me. "It's a great city to live in and a great city to skate in." Veronica is an avid skater, finding it very helpful in her rehabilitation from surgery. In fact she believes in living as healthy a lifestyle as possible. "I don't drink, I don't smoke, I don't do drugs. I'm vegan and I eat gluten free. Pure mind and a pure body, baby!" she says, laughing.

Much like her tongue piercing, Veronica's desire to have her eyeballs tattooed connects with a childhood fascination. "I first came across eyeball tattoos through the extreme body mod website created by the late, great Shannon Larratt. Then I watched a documentary that showed a couple of prisoners having the procedure done, which suddenly triggered some very strong childhood memories about colouring in cartoon characters' eyes! I knew I had to learn how to do this procedure. I spent many months studying the structure of the eye, reading everything I could find, and watching videos of eyeball tattooing being done by others. When I felt I knew enough, I did it on myself. That was back in May 2010. I inked each eye at a different time to ensure that any complications didn't lead to a total loss of eyesight. Then once I was fully healed, and felt comfortable with the technique, I performed the procedure on a modified friend of mine."

Eyeball tattooing is controversial. Many in the tattoo industry have serious concerns about it, but Veronica views it in the same way as she views any other body modification – yes, there is an inherent risk, but the risk is minimised if the procedure is carried out correctly. She is quick to point out that very different equipment is used compared to standard skin tattooing. "It's a different technique altogether. A tattoo machine would ruin an eyeball in a very short amount of time. It's actually a number of injections of ink under the surface layer of the eyeball. The ink itself is the same as in a conventional tattoo. Obviously each time I am requested to do a colour I've not previously done, I research the ingredients of the ink to ensure there's nothing I feel to be an irritant to the eye."



But does it hurt? "Although there are many nerves in the eye, I have yet to experience anyone who feels any significant discomfort when the needle piercers the surface layer of the eye," explains Veronica. "Most people just feel a slight pressure and a minor irritation akin to an eyelash in the eye. The most significant obstacle to overcome is the unconscious defensive response to anything approaching the eye. In terms of healing, the first week is the worst because the eye swells slightly and is very sensitive to light or the elements. Aftercare consists of regular washing with saline solution and wearing sunglasses to protect the eyes when outdoors."

Veronica is upfront about the potential dangers of the procedure. "The most scary one is obvious; blindness. It's difficult to be exact about the risks involved as there has been no long term study into eyeball tattoos. Potential problems include blurred vision, inflammation of the eye and optic nerve, and minor headaches. I myself have experienced staining around the eye due to ink seeping into the surrounding tissue." But despite the unknown long term risks Veronica is very happy with her tattooed eyes. "Eyeball tattoos are beautiful. Once healed you just look amazing!" she says with a smile. And she's considering expanding her portfolio too. "At the moment I just tattoo eyeballs but I'm seriously thinking about going into conventional tattooing. I have plenty of ideas. I just need to find the time to focus on my drawing and build my skills."

Veronica has come a long way from the shy child she was back in Poland, but rather than her heavily modified appearance it's her transgender status that has attracted the most unwanted attention. "When people ask me stupid questions about my body mods I usually just give them a sarcastic response or turn it into a bit of a joke. But what really bothers me is when they go straight to talking about my genitals. They wouldn't ask anyone else about their genitals the first time they met them, would they? And as soon as they find out I'm trans, I really get a grilling. It's really rude. But luckily in the western body mod community people are respectful. It's the outsiders looking in who bring the disrespect."

"The body mod community has a real strong LGBTQIA presence. Being trans is normal. If you're into body mods you're going to be open-minded. You have to remember that if you discriminate against others because of their body mod choice and lifestyle, they could do the same to you – so it's a very open and honest world to be in."



Veronica's striking appearance lends itself well to being photographed and her social media accounts are proving popular with people fascinated by her other-worldly appearance and sci-fi fetish outfits. Sadly, though, not all her fans are willing to embrace her as a trans woman. "I get a lot of online messages from people complimenting me on my look. They want to chat and get to know me, which is great, but as soon as you talk about meeting up the tone changes. They do want to meet, but they don't want their friends and family knowing they're dating a trans woman. I've had guys saying they fancy me and want to get it together, but they want to keep it quiet. It's OK that I'm a tattooed body modified freak, but there's this shame around dating or having sex with a trans. It's all really messed up. I'm proud of who I am and if people want to judge me, then that's just them projecting their own insecurities on to me. I'm done with being someone's sex toy or fetish."

Transgender issues and politics have received a lot of media attention lately and I ask Veronica why she thinks this is. "Let's face it, trans people are interesting. We're revolutionary," she says proudly, her dark eyes beaming.

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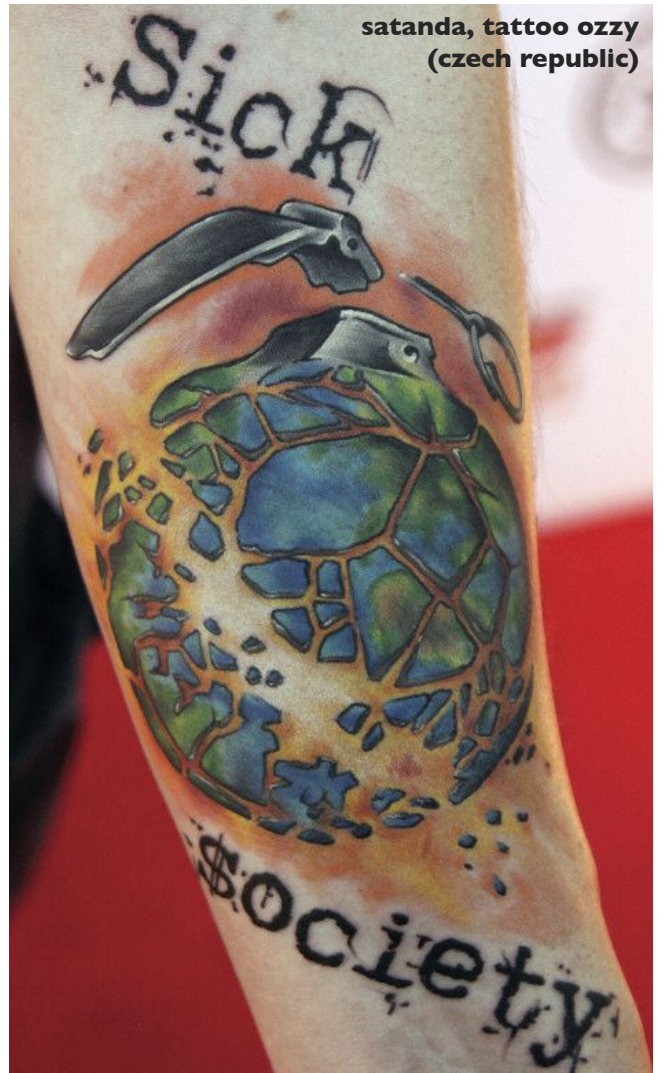
wes, insider tattoo



sicko black, good changes (russia)



chris sutton, flaming art



satanda, tattoo ozzy (czech republic)

tom petucco,
evil from the needle



anrijs straume, bold as brass



aaron clapham,
wolf and arrows



steve jarvis, 88 miles per hour



santa perpetua, private studio



sean scouler, honest ink



alan hindes, tattoo house



henry viper sieranski, cool creations

pedro mendonca,
grey area custom



mikey black, elixir ink



yogesh, leo tattoo (india)



lucian broughton, nine owls





**steven mostyn,
memories and mischief (germany)**



daryl watson, painted lady tattoo parlour



chris, inkdependent



max pniewski, southmead tattoo

lefteris, stilbruch (germany)



alan hindes, tattoo house



satanda, tattoo ozzy (czech republic)



will barbour brown, blue dragon tattoo



rose whittaker, cult classic tattoo



wes, insider tattoo

daniel, inkdependent



kev, aberdeen tattoo collective



chris micallef, inkdependent



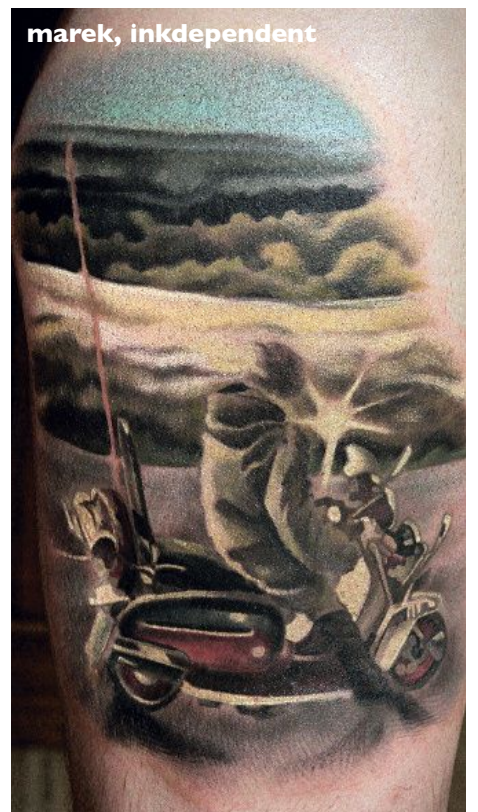
bryan holman,
brutal truth tattoo club



john,
aberdeen tattoo collective



mike boyd, the circle



marek, inkdependent



pete oz, tanuki tattoo



yarson, yarson tattoo



hanan qattan, circle of swords



marek, inkdependent



jethro, cloak and dagger

jonathan toogood,
imperial tattoo company



joe ankave (israel)



moira, 25 to life (holland)



luke somerville, jacks tattoo



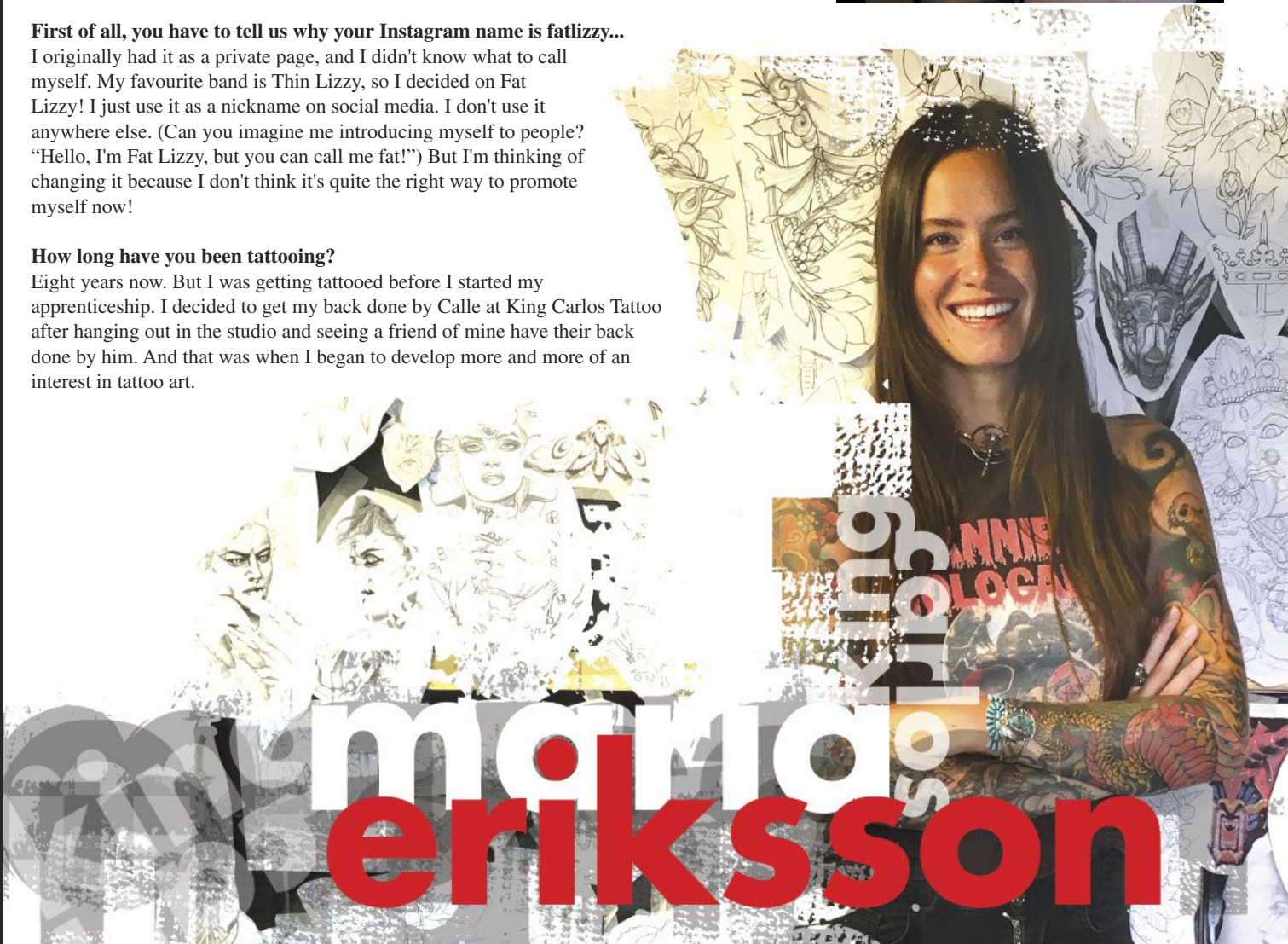
Interviewing Maria from King Carlos Tattoo was a treat. As she herself says, her vibrant creativity and extreme self-doubt are a terrible combination, but her wonderful sense of humour carries her through and she clearly builds a fantastic rapport with her customers.

First of all, you have to tell us why your Instagram name is fatlizzy...

I originally had it as a private page, and I didn't know what to call myself. My favourite band is Thin Lizzy, so I decided on Fat Lizzy! I just use it as a nickname on social media. I don't use it anywhere else. (Can you imagine me introducing myself to people? "Hello, I'm Fat Lizzy, but you can call me fat!") But I'm thinking of changing it because I don't think it's quite the right way to promote myself now!

How long have you been tattooing?

Eight years now. But I was getting tattooed before I started my apprenticeship. I decided to get my back done by Calle at King Carlos Tattoo after hanging out in the studio and seeing a friend of mine have their back done by him. And that was when I began to develop more and more of an interest in tattoo art.





Was there a moment where you thought “I need to do this”?

I had a friend who had loads of sketchy tattoos that had been done ‘at home’. She said, “You should try tattooing me!” – so I did. I realised then that it was an awesome way of doing art, and that it was what I wanted to do. I’d been to art school, and I’ve been drawing all my life. At art school I did a lot of portraits in different media. Anything I could get hold of...

Do you think your art education has helped you as a tattooist?

Not really! I think there’s a big difference between making art in an educational setting and being a tattooist. When you’re tattooing, you do what you feel like doing and you don’t have to justify everything. That doesn’t mean it has no meaning though. And it certainly doesn’t make it any less of an artform.



You apprenticed under Calle?

Yeah, which is pretty amazing! Not only because he's such a great artist, but also because he's a fantastic person. To be part of his and Synnöve's studio... I couldn't have wished for anything better. I'd previously asked another tattooist, Lil Lay at Salvation Tattoos (who's super old school), if I could apprentice with him – but he said no because he'd just opened his studio and he didn't really have the time. But he mentioned to Calle that I was looking for an apprenticeship. I hadn't approached Calle myself because I thought he was too 'big' and it would just be wrong to ask him... He was brilliant to learn under.

When you first started to learn, what did you find most difficult?

I remember one time when I was an apprentice I was supposed to add a Japanese background to a koi and I just blew it with the shading! I found working with greyscale so hard...





Did you start off in realism?

Yes. Since I was already comfortable drawing in a realistic style, I did do a lot of realism to begin with. But after a while I felt that I was holding myself back. I wanted to be a bit more free with my designs and not have to copy things directly from photos. It was blocking my creativity. I've been working in a more neo-traditional style for about three years now. I'm a very creative person and I felt I needed to get more out of the drawing and design process.





Do you make use of technology?

I haven't moved on to things like the iPad. I draw everything on paper. I don't want to lose that physical feeling. It's so satisfying. Don't get me wrong, I think technology is incredible and of course it's the way of the world now. But I like the fact that I have to concentrate and make mistakes. I want to be a bit afraid when I draw or paint!

Do you still have time to do your own drawing, or is it all for your customers?

I'm really disciplined with my art and my drawing. I always draw my sketches for customers a week early so I can have them look over the design. And because my mind is so focused on my customers, I don't usually have much time to draw for myself. But during our five week summer holiday my mindset is different. That's when I can focus on my own art.

Is there ever a conflict between the tattoo you want to do and the tattoo the customer wants you to do?

If I think something won't work in a tattoo, I'll tell the customer why and I'll ask them to reconsider. I want the work to look good for ever, and I'm very thorough about talking to my customers about what works and what doesn't. For instance you can't have a sleeve with tons of subjects. It's a common misconception that because it's a large area, lots of things will fit in. But with my style of tattooing, you only need a couple of elements for the piece to work. That's another thing that Calle taught me. After all, King Carlos is known for working big! Large scale tattoos always looks good.

What's your favourite subject matter?

I love doing anything that's nature-related. And I still enjoy doing both male and female faces. I've done a lot of women because people seem to prefer them!

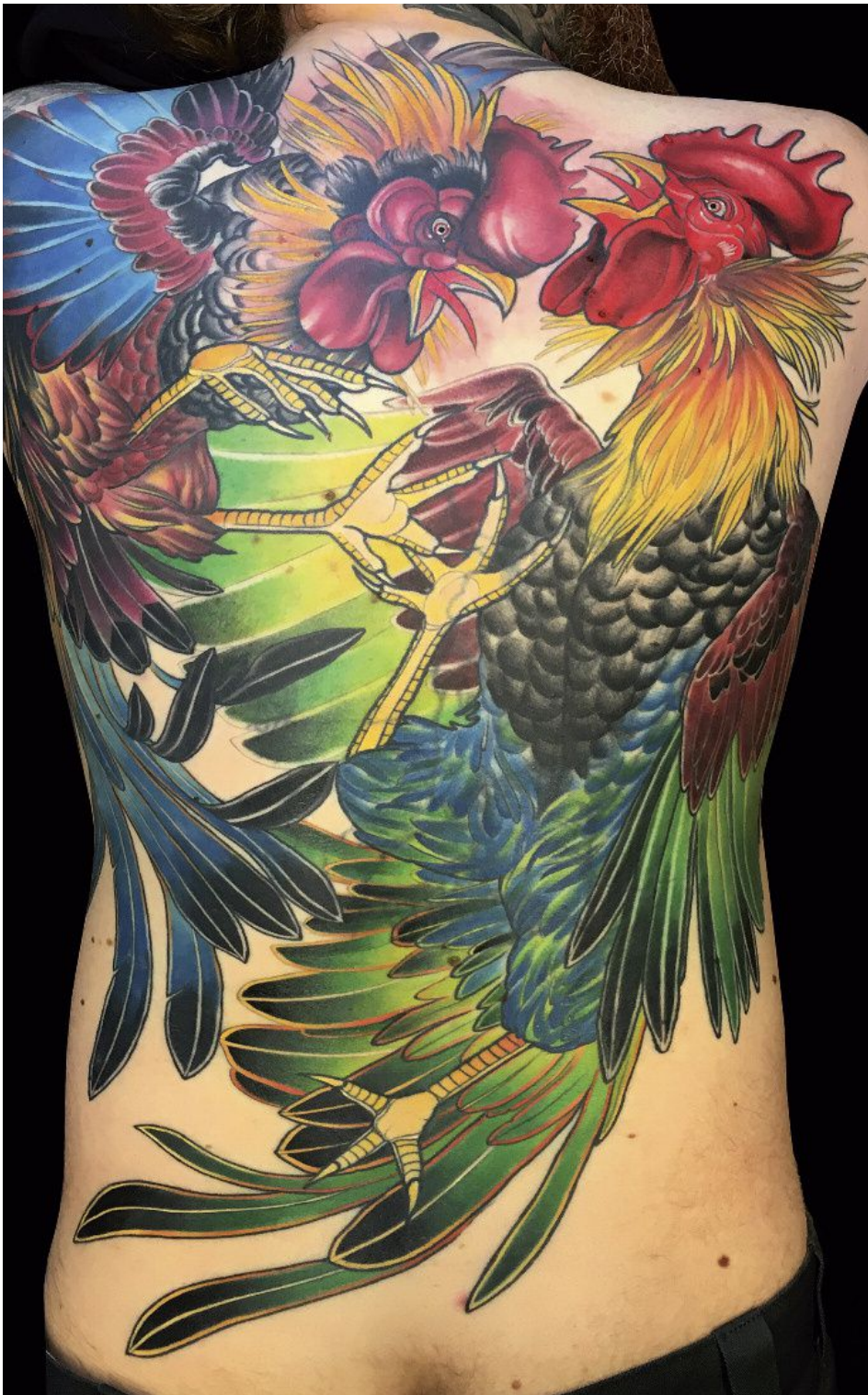


Are you inspired by any particular artists outside of tattooing?

Lots of artists inspire me. I love the sensuality of Alphonse Mucha... but that's just one example among many. With the internet, it's so easy to find artistic inspiration from so many different sources.

You're working in a very famous studio. Because you apprenticed there, do you think you feel less pressure than if you'd joined as a new artist?

We're like a family. It's so weird when you're at a convention and people come up to the booth, and you realise just how big a reputation Calle (and the studio) has. I don't feel intimidated though, because I've always felt so comfortable and welcomed. Calle is very grounded; he just focuses on the tattooing. He's taught me a lot. Having low self-esteem, it's fantastic to work with someone who thinks that you're good and can see the potential in you. I still don't believe it sometimes!

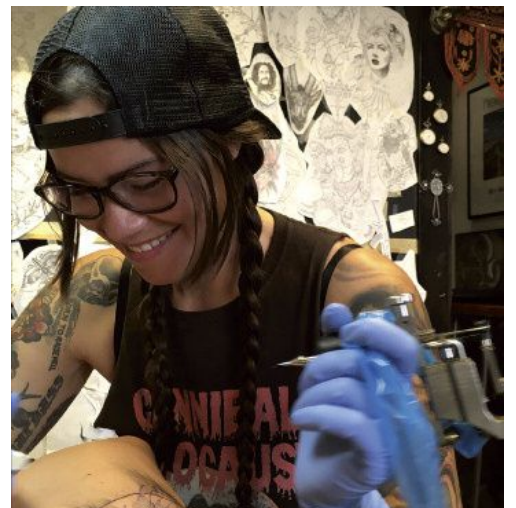


Your style is very different to Calle's...

Yeah, I should be doing Japanese! Seriously though, it's great at the shop because even though our styles are all different, we all talk to each other about what we're doing. We'll even ask each other for opinions on colours while we're working. It's very open and collaborative. Even Calle asks us what we think of his stuff. We're all equal.

You mentioned low self-esteem. Are you your own worst critic?

Definitely! I'm really hard on myself. But at the same time, I guess it's my way of pushing myself to improve. Sometimes it gets too much though, the pressure I put on myself. If I email someone their design and they haven't replied in an hour I'm thinking, "They're probably talking about how ugly it is!" Calle always says to me, "Maria, stop it!" With painting, it's even worse. Oh, man! But I'm working on it...



It must be nice when you've finished a customer's tattoo and you see their reaction?

Absolutely. It's an amazing thing to see. It makes it all worthwhile, especially if it's something like a special portrait that means a great deal to them. It can get very emotional, and it just makes me love my job even more.

What would you say are your strengths?

Oh, that's a difficult one to answer! I'm not sure, because I tend to only see the weaknesses!

Do you feel confident in saying no to customers if you feel you're not the right artist for them?

Yes I do. I know my own style, and if I don't think I'm the right person for the job I feel comfortable about turning someone down. I'm very honest about that kind of stuff. I explain what I enjoy doing, and I show them examples of my work. The customer might sometimes reconsider what they want from the tattoo, but if we don't click then that's fine. And if that happens, I always try to recommend another tattooist in the area who may be more suited. I just want the best for the tattoos, and ultimately the customers. If you're honest, then you feel better about yourself too.



In today's competitive climate, do you feel there's a pressure to stay 'original'?

Yes, I do. I see so many things posted on social media and I think, "Oh man, why didn't I come up with that?!" There's so much talent out there. I try not to get too engulfed in comparing myself with other artists. Instead, I see other people's work as inspiration for my own ideas.

It's all too easy to get sidetracked and overwhelmed by what everyone else is doing.

Exactly.

In terms of equipment, what do you use?

For lining I use coils, and I use rotaries for shading. I tried using Calle's Cheyenne Pen and it was weird. So light! But so good for your wrists. I might try that some more, but I'm not yet ready to give up my coils. There's an art in coils, and I really love the old school way. I like to feel the rawness in the coils.

And the tattoo history...

Definitely.

What does tattooing mean to you?

Tattooing is a really amazing way of expressing art on skin. It's incredible what you can do. I've been creative all my life – playing music, drawing, etc – and having a job where I can be creative all the time is wonderful. It's what keeps me alive. I like to live in the moment and keep figuring things out, and I just want to get better and better. I really want to thank Calle for everything he's done for me.

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NORWICH BODY ARTS FESTIVAL

2016 was a bit of a let down, wasn't it? A lot of celebrity deaths, a lot of politics... and no Norwich Body Arts Festival. But thankfully the Festival was back this year and boy, were we all ready for it! It might be a cliché, but absence certainly does make the heart grow fonder, and it was apparent from the very start how happy people were to be there, either working or attending.

The venue, Open, is an ideal building for a tattoo convention. Upon entering, there was a large space filled with booths, leading to a stage area with more tattooists. To the side there was a separate bar and an entertainment area for over 14s. Near the entrance was a set of stairs which led to the traders, more tattooists and a food court area, with games and entertainment for the under 14s.

Throughout the weekend, there was background music playing amongst the familiar buzzing of machines, whilst hand-picked performers and acts played in the bar area, with the times of upcoming acts announced over the PA system. With smaller venues like this, having a separate room for entertainment works really well as it means that people can tattoo (or get tattooed) without loud, unexpected noise or distraction.

Now in its eighth year, the Festival maintained its famous friendly and fun vibe, an opinion echoed by both public and tattooists. This year, the artist line-up really was second to none. Seventy five of the UK and Europe's best tattooists were present. Inevitably, many were booked-up in advance due to their popularity, but there were also many who took walk-ups with tempting designs. For those who didn't want to commit to ink under the skin, Georgina (Henna Soul) was on hand with her beautiful and impeccable henna designs. And for tattooists looking for academic enlightenment, there was a seminar by the legendary Hanumantra. The talk, entitled "Beyond The Black", debuted at the Goa Tattoo Festival last January and this was therefore a rare UK treat that wasn't to be missed.

As the weekend ended, I was left wondering just what it was about the Norwich Body Arts Festival that made it stand out in the convention circuit. On paper, the format is similar to many other shows – great artists, entertainment, good on-site catering, etc – but the Festival also has a wonderful atmosphere that breezes right through the building and the people. It's an absolute tonic – uplifting, confident and fun. Let's hope that there are no more breaks, and that this convention continues to excel year after year.



1. owen merridith, black dog tattoos
2. poster block by lacey law
3. little andy, the church
4. darren ditto, love and light tattoo
5. julie edwards, flaming gun
6. josh hurrell, legacy ink
7. arty cow, inkarma tattoo
8. poppy sega, ink addition
9. inky joe, five keys





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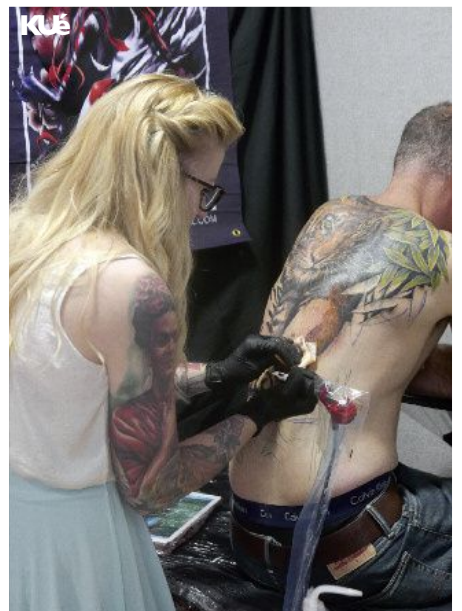
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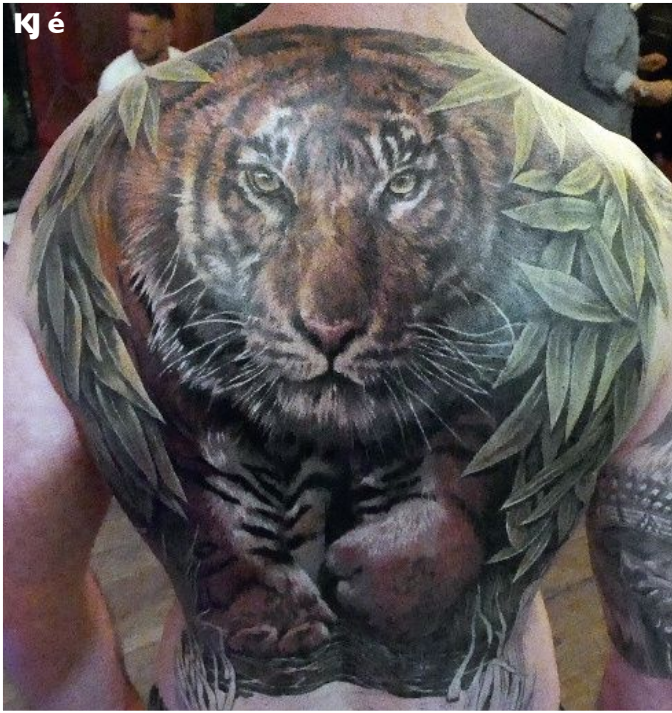
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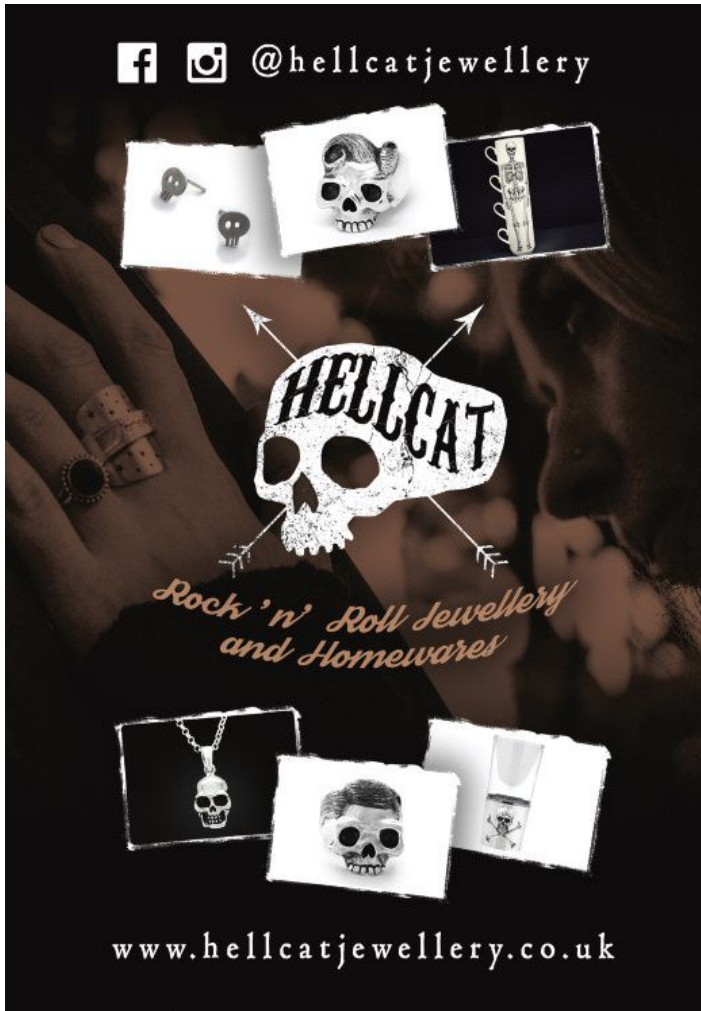
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


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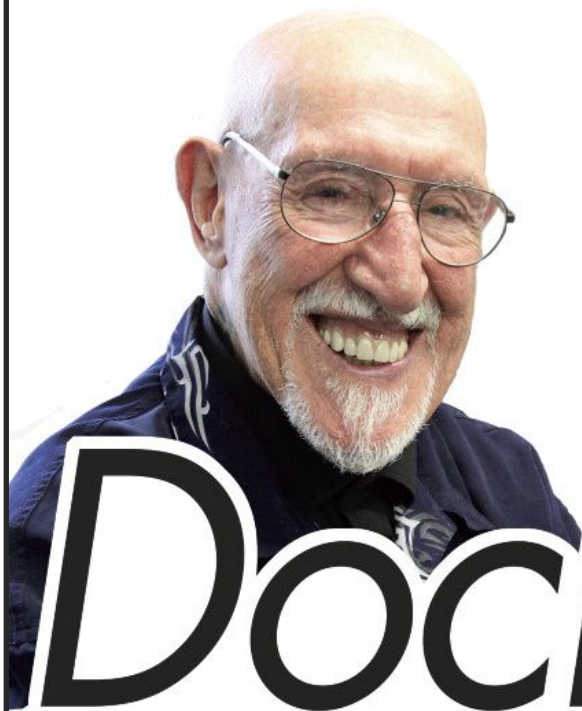
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Interview by Perry
Pictures by Perry & Doc Price

Doc Price



At the age of 85, with a career spanning more than six decades, Doc Price is a living legend and probably one of the oldest working tattooists in the western world. He remains humble and appreciative of all that life has given him, and he shows no sign of stopping any time soon! We met up with him while he was doing a guest spot at Adrian Willard's new studio, Tiger Bones Tattoo in Brighton, and he told us his life story.

I started our chat by asking Doc how he was feeling on this monumental day at his good friend's studio. "I'm very well," he told me. "Much better than I should be. You hear so much about the older generation with all their illnesses and problems, but I'm lucky to only have a small spot on my ankle. Everything else is functional!"

I asked Doc his age... "I'm 85. I was born the day that Adolf Hitler came to power. I started my working life in a pottery factory, and the chap I worked with had been a sailor. He had a butterfly tattoo on the back of his hand that even today would still be considered an excellent piece of work. That was my first ever experience of a tattoo. I then had the opportunity to go down to Cardiff and Tiger Bay. In the window of a café there was a little card which said 'Tattooing' and for two shillings and sixpence I got my first tattoo off Bill Knight, the father of Jessie Knight. The sign on the door said 'No Swearing' and the lady went into Billy and said 'There's two little bastards out here wants to get tattooed!' That was over seventy years ago."



"Of course, your first tattoo should always be 'Mum'. Then they can't complain... Although I did get one lady come in to tell me that I'd ruined her son's life by getting him tattooed. 'I'm sorry,' I said, 'I too was tattooed very young. How old is your son?' '38,' she replied! I just quietly shut the door."

"I was 22 when I decided that I wanted to become a tattooist. I'd been a bricklayer's apprentice. All my friends had tattoos and I just knew that I could do them. I'm actually dyslexic and I can't see some letters at all, which is a real pain in the butt. Although because of that, art was all I was good at during school, so I was allowed to sit at the back of the class and quietly draw. When I left school I had no capacity to read and write, so I set about teaching myself through intuition and determination and just having a need to."

So Doc decided that a career change was required and he bought some tattoo equipment from the back pages of Exchange & Mart. I wondered what company was selling machines in 1955? "Picaro tattoo machines, seven pounds ten shillings a pair. I bought Pelikan ink, which we still use today. It's served its purpose all my life. I had a shop in Hereford, a market town that was busy on Wednesdays, and then I got the opportunity to go and work down near the beach at Barry Island. I rented a small ice cream kiosk. My customers would sit outside in the rain and I would sit inside the kiosk tattooing away. It would always rain on Barry Island at 12 o'clock, so you would always look forward to working around midday."



Les Skuse (L) and Doc Price (R)

Doc told me his original set-up was very basic and not a bit like the sterile equipment and hygienic surroundings we are familiar with today. "We used to have an old-fashioned inkwell with the ink in, and it would be there for weeks and weeks. I was led to believe that if you changed the ink you would lose the whole spirit of the shop and you would never be able to tattoo well again. Back then, the only thing that could be passed on that we were aware of was venereal disease. I don't even think Hepatitis C was around, and certainly not AIDS. There's a story about the Burma soldiers in the war. The soldiers who got tattooed never got the ulcers that the non-tattooed soldiers did, and it was believed that the tattooists in Calcutta basically inoculated them against all possible diseases by giving them a little bit of everything."



Les Skuse (L)
Doc Price (R)

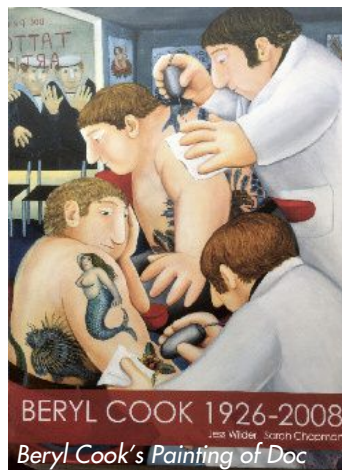
"I never had any official teacher or master. I just got on with it. There were hardly any other tattooists in South Wales then. The nearest would be Les Skuse in Bristol. He was a massive influence on my life. A wonderful, fabulous man. He shared a lot with me, but he was quite a short-tempered guy. You could lose his friendship in a moment, and gain it back in another moment. He was really my mentor, and the only person I knew with that connection to the American culture of tattooing. He knew them all, and could get the American inks and flash sheets. He had Al Schiefley come from America to work with him in his studio."



After being at Barry Island for a while, Doc bought himself a little shop in Pontypridd. He stayed there for about five years, then one day he decided he fancied moving abroad. "I asked the wife if she would like to go and live in South Africa, although of course this is back in the days of Apartheid. It turned into a tragedy for us. The ship sank with all our belongings, then I was rushed into hospital with appendicitis. So we were in Africa, my wife and children were living in a high-rise flat with no furniture, and I was trying to make ends meet bricklaying. We were in Johannesburg first, then we went down to Durban for about ten months. By then I was desperate. We had no money, no belongings to speak of, and I was still trying to get over the operation. So we had to sell the shop in Pontypridd and that paid for our tickets to come home. I ended up in Newport, Gwent, and then a year later I said to the wife, 'Do you fancy moving to Australia?' We had a fabulous time there, but you can't believe the heat! And so we came back."



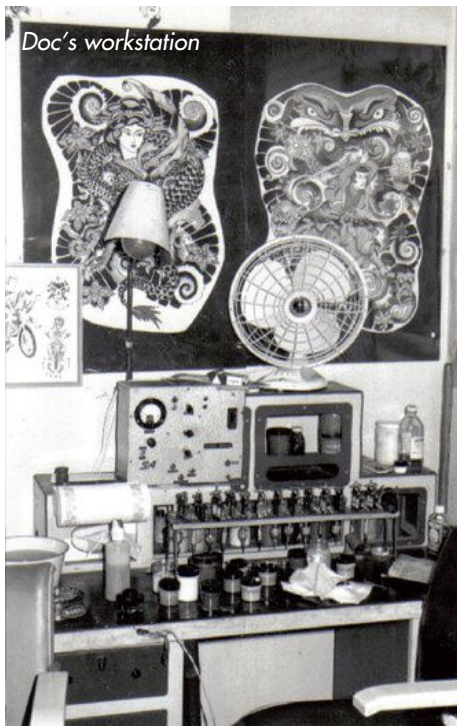
Doc Price (L) and Ronnie Ackers (R)



"In all, we've moved thirty six times. I wanted to open a tattoo shop in Chatham, but when I went and spoke to Charlie Bell, the local tattooist there, he told me to eff off. He said go to Plymouth, where there hadn't been a tattooist for three years. So we moved from the beach hut where we were living to rent the shop in Plymouth, and we've been there for forty seven years."



Doc in his studio in Australia



Doc's workstation



Doc comes in from the workshop



"It's my son's shop now. I live above it, and I come down every day. I like to keep busy. I'll make machines, and I still tattoo, not because I need to, just because I have a desire to. I am very much driven to continue tattooing, partly because I am old, but age really is a state of mind. If you keep working, age disappears. You're always thinking about what you have to do that day, thinking about your client. If I stopped tattooing I would be dead, because I would serve no purpose. Tattooing is what gives me a purpose and keeps me going."

We'd been talking for some time when I suddenly remembered to ask Doc where the 'Doc' part of his name comes from. "Tattooing was always seen as a dark art and a lot of tattooists gave themselves medical names," he explained. "I very much admired Doc Forbes and Doc Webb. Both were iconic tattoo figures, so I thought 'Doc Price' sounded good. My real name is Daryl Price Morris."



Doc working at Tiger Bones opening party





Doc is an amazingly positive, progressive and up-beat character. I asked him when was his golden period of tattooing, and without hesitation he smartly replied, "Now! Yesterday I wasn't as good as I am today, and tomorrow I'll be better and more experienced. It's always now. What's the point of looking back and saying 1952 was a great year? I love tattooing and it gets better every day. Tattooing has given me the opportunity to get paid in a decent and direct way all my life. I do my work and as soon as it's finished I get paid there and then. It's a simple and rewarding way to earn a living. I have only ever been stiffed on a payment once, which is not bad in such a long career."

I asked Doc what he feels have been the most important developments within tattooing. Once again, he answers with great certainty. "Hygiene, and the understanding of cross-contamination. That's very, very important." Then he continues, "And the love of old-style tattooing, which is so prevalent now! Many a Saturday I'd ask my customer, 'Why do you want a black panther?' 'Oh, it's because my dad had one.' If children want to have the same tattoo as their parents, that's a great reflection of their respect and love. Of course the styles and techniques have improved, and so people are getting larger and more prominent pieces now. The standard of work today is equal to (and better than) many of the pieces we did years ago. Another great thing about modern tattooing is the female aspect. Female tattooists have the same ability as any man, and are able to charge the same too, making tattooing a profession that really does have equal opportunities."



Doc working an early convention

Our conversation moved on to styles of tattooing and the merits of realism. Many years ago, whilst on Barry Island, Doc saw an amazing realistic wolf by Doc Forbes. Later he got to question Forbes about the technique he used and why the tattoo remained so good so many years after completion. Forbes told him, "I lay colours on top of colours on top of colours, so the final colour won't be the colour you see. As time passes, pigment migrates and the colours fade, but with many passes the layered colours will always look good." Doc told me, "The benefit of a long career is that you can draw from your own experience and have confidence in your own techniques, because you can see finished and healed tattoos from many years ago. If you are lucky, you make good mistakes now and then!"

I asked Doc if there was anything he used to use that he can no longer get hold of – anything that he particularly misses. "Many years ago, in the fifties, the company ICI created a group of pigments that were fabulous. They sat in the skin, stayed super bright, and were stable. They were just great. I had the good fortune to have a friend who worked for a company in Bristol who produced inks for the printing industry and he used to get me barrels of pigment. He'd have got the sack if they caught him supplying a tattooist! We were never thought of very highly. Not like today. Tattooing is so much better received now, and we have to thank people like David Beckham for that. He's done a good job. Anyone in the public eye with tattoos is promoting tattooing, but some of the new TV programmes are very low quality. And then you have the freaks with their noses split open and their eyeballs tattooed. I thought I knew a lot about tattooing but I don't understand much of this extreme stuff. Why would someone endanger his or her sight just to go that bit further? Generally I don't have a lot of time for these characters that have their faces tattooed because it affects the public view of tattooing and usually it's in a negative way. I wouldn't tattoo anyone's face unless they were a real old-time customer and I knew they could carry it."



Doc with the guys from Tiger Bones in Brighton



Doc in his foundry



One of Doc's knives

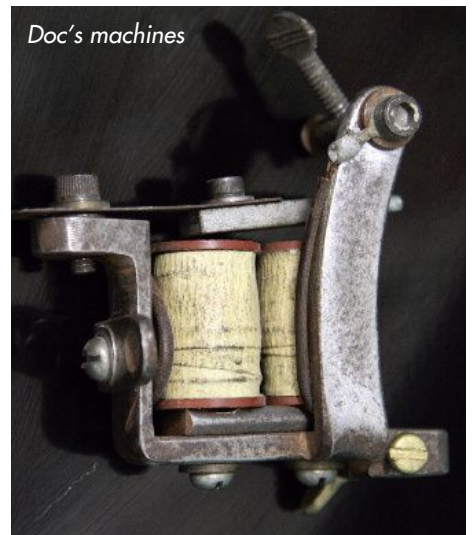
Doc is incredibly fit and able for a man of his years. I asked how he has managed to maintain such good health? "I have always done martial arts throughout my life," he told me. "I have twelve black belts – three in Judo, three in Aikido and six in Kendo. I finally stopped practising when I got to 75 because my knees no longer worked as they should."

Through his dedication to martial arts, Doc developed a serious interest in swords and knives. He is an internationally recognised sword-maker, having studied the craft in Japan and America. "Most of the stuff I make now I tend to keep," he told me. "I make all the metal elements – the blades, the Tsuba (hilt) and the Habaki (the cap on the end of the handle) – and I have a large forge. I make knives too, and I attend conventions all over the world, but tattooing has always been my first love."

Over the years Doc has had a few apprentices. "Tony Cohen from Sydney was probably one of my best! And I've had a few other friends that I've tormented over the years. They have become great tattooists now. The old school apprenticeship is the most positive way to get into tattooing. It enables the techniques and the understanding and the personality to develop so the apprentice becomes a good craftsman. It's the old way. You learned from your master, then when you had the opportunity, you taught somebody yourself. That's how knowledge has been passed down for generations. To set up a three year university course - I don't think that would serve any purpose. It wouldn't be personal enough and it wouldn't be long enough. How long does it take to become a tattooist? Ten years, minimum? The Japanese wouldn't consider an apprenticeship of less than ten years."

I asked Doc for a few final words of advice. "Look to your tattooing and enjoy the work that you achieve. This is a folk craft. It's not the high end art market. We're not going to be able to sell our skins after we are dead. So it's for us to enjoy the life we live with our tattoos. I think tattooing is in a great place at the moment. It's popular. Fantastic work is being done by both sexes. And there's no reason it won't go on getting better. I think the zenith of tattooing is soon to be reached. There cannot be a better time than now for tattooing."

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Adam Beesley (video film maker), Paul Sayce (tattoo historian) and Doc

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Lacey Law

WOODCUTS

Based in Norwich, Lacey Law is already making a name for herself with her stunning woodblock prints. Now, as she prepares to enter the world of tattooing with an apprenticeship at Indigo, we talk to her about her art, her approach to her work, and the relationship between tattooing and printmaking.

Where do you think your creativity comes from?

It comes from my family. My Dad was an illustrator and my Mum has always been creative and crafty, knitting and drawing all the time. And she was a lacemaker, which is why I'm called Lacey! I was always making stuff and drawing from a young age. I think it's in my blood.

And did you pursue a formal education in art?

At school, art was the main thing I was interested in. I had a horrible art teacher, but I didn't let that deter me. I went to City College Norwich to do a BTEC and started to apply to do Fine Art at uni... but then I attended a degree show at Norwich University of the Arts, and when I walked around the Fine Art exhibition I didn't feel that I was 'getting' any of it. The Illustration exhibition, however, was a different matter. It was the year that Hollie West (of Five Keys) graduated. Seeing her work, and the work done by other students on the same course, I realised illustration was what I wanted to do. Before that, I hadn't understood the difference, but it suddenly made sense to me. I didn't get the conceptual side of art – I just liked making things that were pretty! So I decided to do another Foundation year at City College, make my style more illustration-based, and re-apply to do Illustration at uni. It was during that year that I fell pregnant. I'd already gone round the universities and done the interviews, but travelling to other places made me appreciate all the good things about Norwich! I secured a place at NUA... and that's where I discovered printmaking.





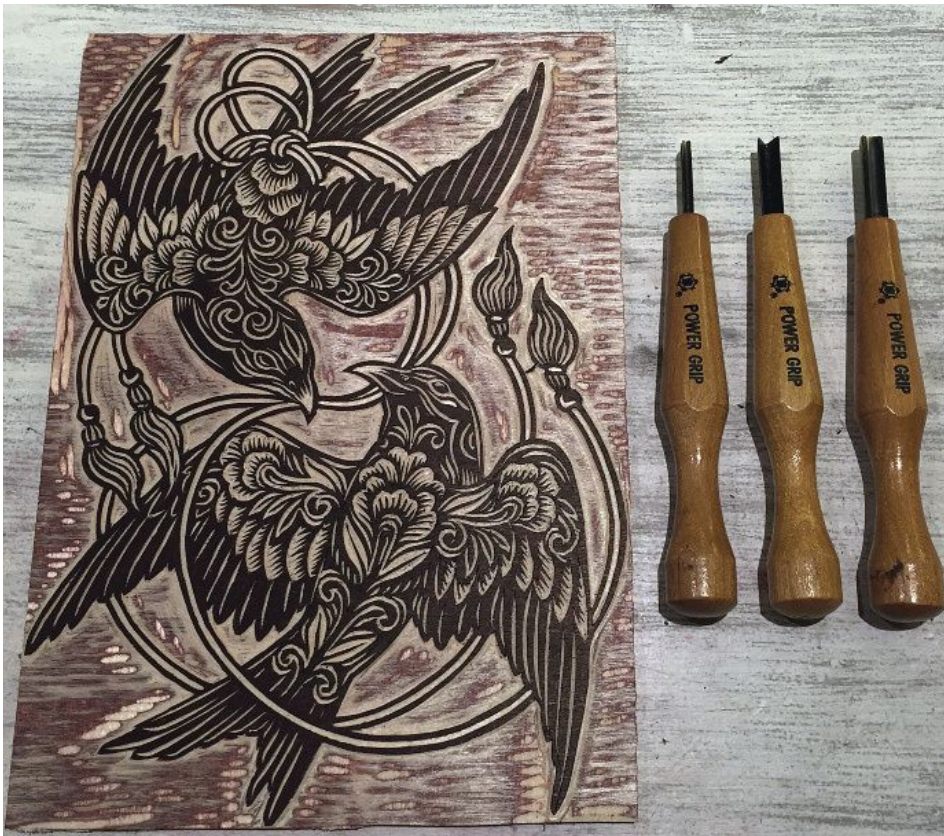
Was printmaking one of the modules?

Yes. During the second year, we did a woodcut workshop with tutor/printmaker Neil Bousfield (though it wasn't actually woodcut because we used plastic). I was hooked. I'd played around with lino in the past, but the woodcut methods really stuck with me.

What was it that attracted you to printmaking?

It gives you restrictions. It tends to be monochrome, and you have to commit to every line. You can't be sketchy with it. You have to be confident. It feels 'dangerous' and real. I also like the messy aspect – using inks and stuff. I think I needed the restrictive aspects of printmaking. All through high school, college and the first year of uni there were so many different artistic media thrown at me, with the pressure to 'find what you like'. I found that difficult because I liked everything and could do it all! I know that sounds a bit pompous, but I knew that I could turn my hand to anything and be happy with it. I needed to find something that challenged me and gave me focus. Another aspect of printmaking that I really like is the fact that you're working with a material (the woodblock) where you're taking away, rather than adding to it.



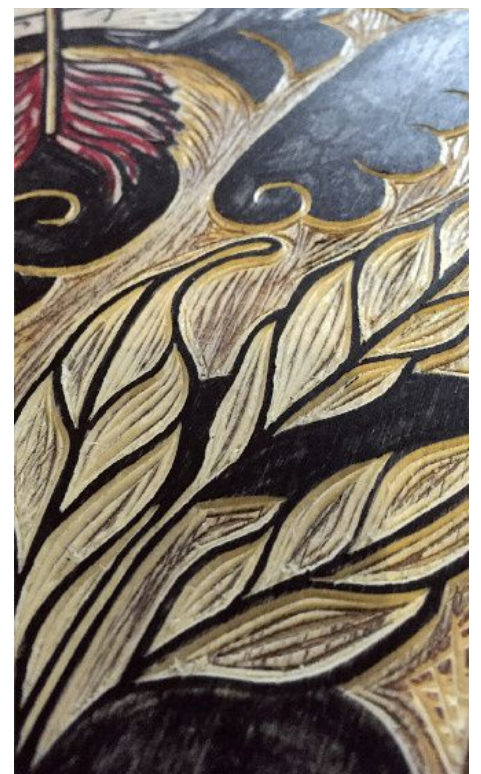


And was this when you began to love working at a large scale?

Yes. Actually I think I got a bit overambitious! I wasn't using wood to print from, because I didn't know where to buy wood at the kind of size I wanted. I ended up buying lino floor tiles, because the lino was similar to the plastic I'd been using. (I used to take my tools around Homebase and try them out!) I threw myself into the print room at uni because they had massive presses where I could print massive images. The print technician was amazing. When I walked in with my first enormous block I don't think he'd ever seen anything so ridiculously big and ambitious before! He looked at me as if to say, "Are you fucking kidding me?!" I was like, "Well, I've cut it now, so we're gonna have to work out how to print it aren't we?" He was quite a hard nut to crack, but in the end I think I earned his respect. During my third year, with Neil Bousfield's help, I found a supplier of large pieces of Japanese plywood – a fairly soft wood – which is what I still use.

So in a way, artistically, you'd arrived...

Yes. It was generally expected that by our third year we'd all have our epiphanies as to what we wanted to do – and that was mine. I think it came pretty late, but it finally happened and I wasn't going to leave any room for the tutors to question me. It's their job to criticise of course, but at some point you have to stand up and say, "No, this is what I'm doing." I felt confident with it, so I ran with it. The degree show was good and I got a good mark. But I realised that once my degree course was finished I was never going to be able to use that print room again, or those massive presses. That was really hard, because I felt so confident doing big work, but now I would have no way of printing it. So I had to reassess, and bring everything down in scale.





Since then, have you changed anything else about how you work?

I used to sketch onto a pad and then fuff about with tattoo carbon paper to transfer the image onto the woodblock. If I had an idea for something, a peony let's say, I would draw it over and over again until it was 'perfect' before transferring it. Then I'd spend ages thinking about which way round it was going to go – that sort of thing. Now, I keep all my ideas in my head until I'm ready to print them and then I just draw straight onto the block. I'll do a sketch in pencil first, then go over it with a light-coloured Sharpie – a bit like when tattooists draw on the skin to freehand – until I'm happy with the design. But I don't think about how I'm going to cut it until the time comes. I'm not thinking about negative space or anything like that; it's still just a drawing. One of my favourite moments in the whole printmaking process is when I finish a sketch on the wood and think, "OK, this one's working. This is gonna be a good one."



Some of your print runs are very limited in number...

Whenever I've done limited editions they've mainly been reduction prints – which are also called 'suicide prints' because the woodblock gets progressively destroyed while you're printing from it. (You cut a layer of the design into the block, then print from that in your first colour, then you cut another layer into the same block to print your second colour...) But even if I do a two- or three-colour print using a series of blocks that line up to make one image, I know that there will inevitably be some mistakes in the run (such as not lining up the blocks properly) and I'm not going to be able to endlessly print clean. So if I was to print maybe twenty, I'd pick the best ten to make an edition because they're the ones I'd be able to sell. A lot of it has to be guesswork. That's the nature of the printmaking process.



What happens to the blocks when you've finished printing with them?

They sit on my mantelpiece at home! But I recently sold some of them online. There are some artists, for example Deardirk, who only sell their blocks – not their prints. When Deardirk is cutting a block she is mindful that it's the final piece, whereas I'm more concerned with what the prints will look like. And I'm a bit nervous about selling blocks to the 'wrong person', as there's always the potential for them to be used to make prints, if the person knows how.

Woodblocks versus digital prints... I guess the older methods have more charm and value?

Absolutely. There are so more mistakes that can be made when you're printing by hand, which is why I show a lot of my processes on my Instagram – because most of the time, if people just see the final image they don't understand the complexity of the printmaking process, or just how much work I've put into making that print. And I want people to know why my work is priced the way it is, too. The word 'print' is used in different ways; my prints are originals from the block. When I did my exhibition at The Circle, I displayed my blocks as well. It was amazing to see the number of people who looked at the blocks that made up the cat, or the bodysuit, and were fascinated by the whole process. As nice as it would be to mass produce these images digitally, I just want to print originals. That's the appeal of it for me – the impression of the design onto the paper. You can see the layers sitting on top of each other, and you'd lose all of that with digital.



Do you see a correlation between woodcuts and tattooing?

Yes I do. In fact a lot of really cool tattoo artists have asked me to do collaborations with them. It might be tricky, but I definitely want to try. Some of the challenges in tattooing are similar to those in printmaking (and that's actually one of the things that makes tattooing so exciting for me). For example cutting a woodblock can be quite nerve-racking because you're taking a sketch and making it into a graphic piece where all the lines absolutely have to work. If you go too far, then you've got to reassess the whole thing. It's that confidence with the lines. You have to know what you're doing, and you have to know that it's going to work. The relationship between printmaking and tattooing is actually one of the things that made me want to work with woodcuts in the first place. It was something Alex Binnie said. He talked about the synergy between Japanese tattoo iconography and Japanese woodblock prints – and how, historically, both artforms were seen as working class, anti-elitist, relatively cheap and accessible, and 'outside' the fine art mainstream. And of course Alex Binnie's woodcut portraits have been a big inspiration. In a way, they kicked it all off for me.

When did you first start wanting to be a tattooist?

I can't remember when I first started thinking about it. It's just always made sense to me. I was always the 'weird arty kid' at school – and weird arty kids tend to become tattooists! It was certainly a theme all through high school and college. Everything I did was tattoo-related – even my dissertation. It's always come back to tattooing for me. And I think that's one of the reasons why everything I draw is on a large scale. I've never wanted to draw small, fiddly things because I've just somehow always known they wouldn't work on skin.

Do you see yourself translating your woodblock designs into tattoos?

The only difference will be colour. In my printmaking I pretty much use only monochrome or black and red. Black and red makes sense. Alex Binnie's influence again! Ichibay is another big inspiration. But I know I will want to use more colour in my tattooing. Claudia de Sabe and Alix Ge's tattoos blow my mind. That's the kind of work that I aspire to do.





Have people asked you if they can have your woodblock designs tattooed on them by other artists?

Yeah, people do keep asking me on social media. If I wasn't apprenticing to be a tattooist myself, then I would maybe say yes – but because they are designs that I might possibly use as tattoos in the future, I've been saying no. It's a tricky one. There are people who have had my designs tattooed and then tagged me on social media afterwards – which, for me, is not OK. I know we are all influenced by other people, but I guess (like everyone else) I'm just trying to do my own thing.

How did you get involved with Indigo?

Completely by chance! Although I'd always wanted to tattoo, I'd pretty much given up on that dream because 'it's too hard, it doesn't happen, don't even go there' – that sort of thing. I first met Gema [owner/manager of Indigo] when I responded to a Facebook post of hers asking for someone to look after her cat while she was on holiday. Then there was a piercing session at the shop and she invited me to apply... and now I'm starting my tattoo apprenticeship there. It's amazing. I feel relieved. It's like, "Finally!" But I'm glad that I didn't get thrown in too fast, and that I've done the time that I have at Indigo before starting to tattoo. I've become more confident, both in myself and in my art, and I've got a following on social media as well, which helps me to know that I'm doing something that's appreciated by others. I'm lucky that I've got such a great family at Indigo. It's so weird how it all sort of fell into place. Before I even knew how much I wanted to tattoo, Indigo was THE shop. When I was a kid coming to visit Norwich, I used to get my piercings there. For me to be working there, when it used to be such a big deal for me to visit when I was younger, is crazy.

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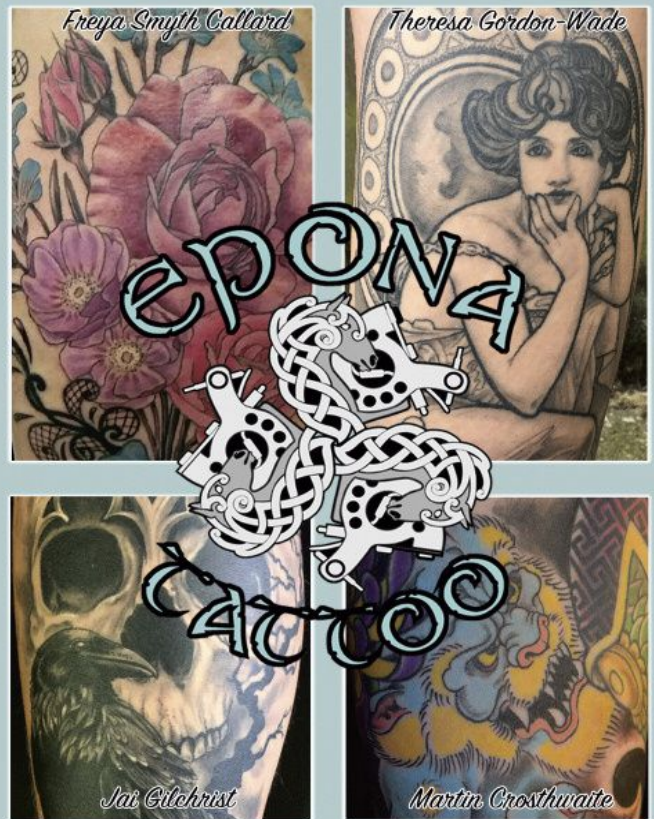
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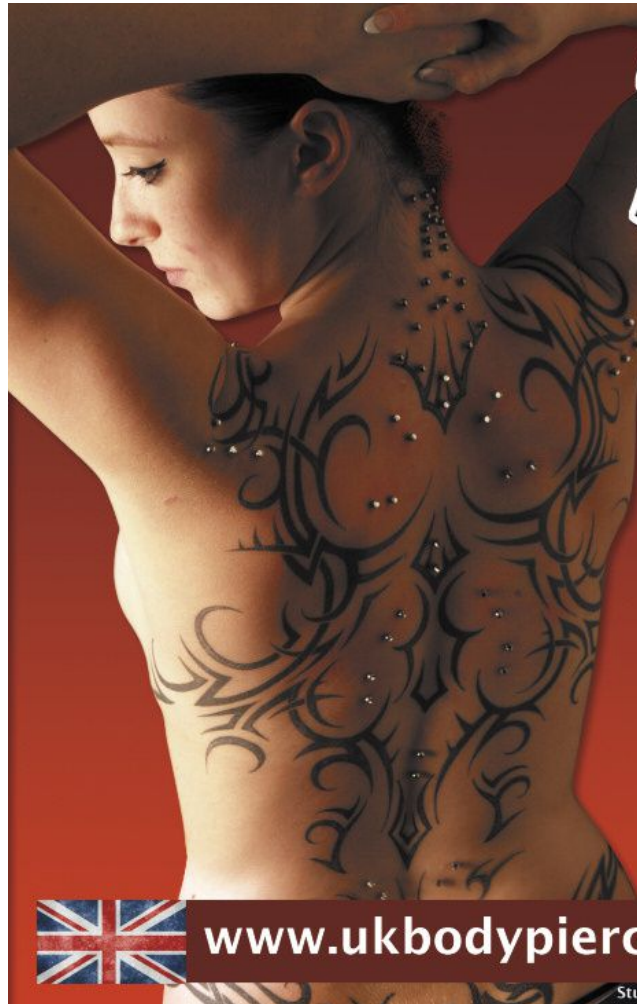
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STRIKE:

The Helmet Project

Most of us can admit to not wearing a cycling helmet at some point in our lives; after all, in the UK it's not illegal to cycle without one. But when you become aware that a potentially fatal head injury can be prevented with such a simple piece of equipment, it makes you think again. In 2015, tattooist Zoe Binnie sustained a serious brain injury while cycling. The exact cause of the accident is unknown but she was found lying in the street, injured and suffering a severe seizure. She ended up in hospital for fifteen days, including time in intensive care. Although she recovered, the process was lengthy and often frightening, involving almost a year of taking debilitating anti-convulsant medication. It was from this awful experience that *STRIKE: The Helmet Project* was born – with the idea of transforming bike helmets into works of art as a creative mission to raise money for the Headway brain injury charity, the organisation that aided Zoe so much in her recovery.

alex binnie



andrew logan



claudia de sabe



daisuke sakaguchi



zoe binnie



emily malice



frank carter



gina moquen



hattie stewart



grayson perry



Headway is a UK-wide charity that works to improve life after brain injury. It provides support, services and information to brain injury survivors, their families and carers, as well as to professionals in the health and legal fields. Twenty seven artists, tattooists and designers were approached for the project – including prominent tattooists such as Jondix, Frank Carter and Claudia de Sabe, fashion designers Shrimps and Terri Cohen, and artists Andrew Logan, Grayson Perry and the Chapman brothers. Each was given a Lazer Sport helmet and creative carte blanche.

To say the results were exciting is an understatement. Each contributor transformed this familiar everyday object into a stunning piece of art. Some painted directly on to the helmet, while others covered it with various materials to form completely new shapes. Florence Druart, for example, sculpted with inflatable rubber; Jim Sanders constructed a beautiful horse's head; and Natacha Marro fabricated an extraordinary bright blue creation that was studded with stars and stiletto heels. Inevitably perhaps, the public's attention was caught by the ceramic helmet made by Turner Prize-winning artist Grayson Perry.

These twenty seven cycle helmets, released from their duties as safety equipment, were about to embark on a whole new life as unique and cherished works of art. They were displayed at Look Mum No Hands!, a cycling-themed café bar and workshop, and were then auctioned off during a spectacular closing party. Online bidding opened a week prior the event and continued live in the room that evening. Alex Binnie kicked off the proceedings by auctioning the piece that had been created by Zoe – a helmet covered entirely in empty snail shells – and the auction of the remaining helmets continued until late in the evening. There were no starting bids or reserves – a risky strategy perhaps, but one which made the auction accessible to everyone without any feeling of intimidation. In total over £20,000 was raised, with every single piece selling and going to a new home.

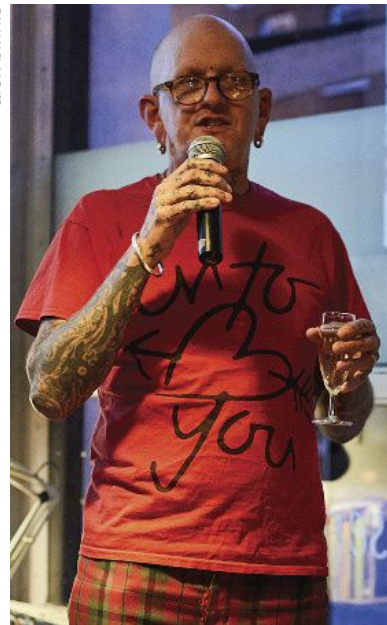
"This aim of this exhibition is to raise awareness of brain injury and the importance of bike helmets, and provide essential financial support for the charity Headway. And we also want to have a bit of fun by turning a rather functional piece of kit into a work of art. Why can't bike helmets be the new skateboards?"

ALEX BINNIE

jondix



alex binnie



PARTICIPATING ARTISTS:

Alex Binnie
 Andrew Logan
 Claudia de Sabe
 Daisuke Sakaguchi
 Ella Masters
 Emily Malice
 Florence Druart / Torture
 Garden Latex
 Frank Carter
 Gina McQuen
 Grayson Perry
 Hattie Stewart
 Jack Boston Oswald
 Jake & Dinos Chapman
 Jennifer Binnie
 Jim Sanders
 Jondix
 Lynnie Z.
 Mister Wim
 Natacha Marro
 Nicola Bowery
 Olivia Snape
 Shrimps
 Stephen Jones
 Stewart Robson & Valerie Vargas
 Terri Cohen
 Tessa Metcalfe
 Zoe Binnie



INTERVIEW WITH CLAUDIA DE SABE

How did you come to be involved with the project?

I was approached by Alice Snape. I've known her for a few years, and I've tattooed her as well. She asked me to be a part and it sounded like a good thing to do, so of course I said yes.

Why did you choose to decorate your helmet with an image of Fudo Myoo?

I love Fudo Myoo iconography. In Buddhism he's the steadfast, immovable Wisdom King and he protects all. He's very powerful and he's always looking after righteous people. I thought it would be a nice protecting symbol to use on a cycle helmet. And aside from that, it's a very striking image.

What materials did you use?

Because I'm a tattooer I chose to decorate the helmet with stencil paper – the kind that I use when applying tattoo designs to my clients' skin. I liked the idea of repetition, and the thought of utilising something that I handle in my work every day.

Did you encounter any particular difficulties?

Yes, it was a little bit tricky. At one point all the paper came off and I had to start all over again! Also, it was a challenge trying to work out how to wrap something curved and space everything correctly to form a readable image, without creasing the paper. But it's nice to think outside the box. I also used a coating spray and everything was reacting strangely, so I had to improvise a lot. It was good fun!

Were there similarities with applying stencil paper to a client's body?

It was similar in some respects, but with skin you have some flexibility – it's soft. With the plastic helmet, there was no flexibility at all and it was a little bit frustrating! It took a lot of patience, but it was worth it in the end.

How long did it take you to make the helmet?

I'm not sure! About four hours I think. As with a lot of my projects, the idea was in my head for a while. And, as usual, I left it until just a week before the deadline to actually start creating it! So I didn't have much time and I had to make it work!



natacha marro



jim saunders



boy george with melanie dickens

jack and dinos chapman



valarie vargas and stewart robson



grayson perry



lynnie zulu



tessa metcalfe



INTERVIEW WITH ORGANISER/CURATOR ALICE SNAPE

How did you come to be involved in *STRIKE: The Helmet Project*?

Alex Binnie approached me with the idea for the project. I already knew that his wife Zoe had been in a serious cycling accident. Zoe and Alex both wanted to raise awareness of the importance of cycle helmets because, before Zoe's accident, they hadn't been aware of the dangers of cycling without one. And Alex knew that I had previously curated successful exhibitions with a charity element. (Miniature Ink and Miniature Ink II had a similar concept to *STRIKE: The Helmet Project* in that every participating artist was invited to decorate exactly the same canvas.)

What was your role?

Alex asked me to organise the whole thing, and he also asked me to invite my own connections within the art world to be part of the line-up. I curated the show, liaised with Headway, did the PR and the admin – basically everything you can think of – and turned my flat into an art storage unit for several months! The exhibition was Alex and Zoe's idea, but I brought it to life and did all the boring bits.

What were your aims for the project?

I really wanted to help promote the work of Headway. The effects of brain injury are very varied; often, it's a "hidden disability". People can appear "normal", but they may be struggling with the most basic things that we take for granted (such as processing information or accessing memories) and there may also be changes in their personality. This is why raising awareness is so, so important. The ultimate aim of the exhibition was to make people think of bike helmets as something more than just purely functional. We wanted to make them hip! And we wanted to ensure that everybody who cycles knows that a helmet can potentially save your life.

How did it all go?

It's been amazing. We reached our £20K target, and lots of people were also commenting that the exhibition made them rethink the way they cycle – which is all we could have asked for! And we welcomed Boy George to the closing party. He ended up buying the Grayson Perry, and that topped the night for me. I'd been looking after that ceramic helmet for months, protecting it with my life. So when he bid £13K for it and then simply carried it home in a taxi without any packaging to protect it, it was both terrifying and amazing. It was wonderful to have someone so well known helping the charity. I feel that way about all the artists who created work for the exhibition.

Be honest – do you have a favourite piece?

It's so hard to pick. They're like my babies, and it was actually really hard to say goodbye to them. I spent two years preparing this exhibition, so I know all the helmets inside out – and the artists who created them too! I love the Grayson Perry and the Jake & Dinos Chapman for obvious reasons. But my favourite right from the start was Ella Masters'. Not only is it gorgeous, but also Ella's mum suffered from a brain trauma (which play a part in her death) so I know that raising awareness about brain injury is very close to Ella's heart.

INTERVIEW WITH DAISUKE SAKAGUCHI

How did you come to be involved with the project?

It was two years ago when Alex Binnie contacted me and told me about Zoe's accident. He said that he wanted to put together a group exhibition to raise money for Headway, who had looked after Zoe. I was definitely up for it from the start. And it slowly grew into something much bigger!

How long did it take you to create your cycle helmet?

Everything I do is hand-made and hand-painted. I don't use any stencils; it's all freehand. But this helmet didn't take me as long as my other works (which can often take two or three months to produce, whether they're 3D objects or paintings on canvas). I wanted to keep to the same style, and capture the same essence, but I challenged myself to do it faster! That was difficult, but I concentrated on keeping it simple and focusing on what makes my work pop out. It was important to me that nobody else would be aware of the shorter time scale. I didn't want to compromise the end result at all; it still had to be slick.

Did you feel constrained, working on a curved helmet?

Not at all. I always like the challenge of working on something that isn't a flat surface, because you have to think about the transition. If I place the design on one part, then turn the helmet, I need to make sure it's all in harmony with the rest of the design around the curve. I think that's fun!

Are you happy with the outcome?

Yes, I'm really happy with the finished piece. I like the colour combination that I've used. My other work tends to be even more colourful, so it was enjoyable to see what I could create without plastering on too much colour this time.

And what do you think about the exhibition?

I love the mix of diverse styles. I also like how some of the artists have maybe not done their usual style. I think it's a great opportunity for people to do something else outside their genre, something other than what they're used to.

nicola bowery



stephen jones



jack boston oswald



Alex Binnie, Alice Snape and Mark Holloway came to us with the idea of creating a fund-raising art project around brain injuries and cycle helmets. We gave them all the support we could by promoting the auction and the event through our website and social media, and by sending publicity out to our corporate contacts. The feedback has been great. Everyone's been really excited about the whole thing. And this closing event has been fantastic. It's literally gone crazy! And to have the likes of Boy George here to support us is amazing. People who weren't able to be here in person were still happy to support the event by bidding online and by being a part of it in that way. Anybody who missed out on the opportunity to buy one of the helmets but would still like to donate to Headway can do so via our website (www.headway.org.uk) where there is the option to give as much, or as little, as you like!

MELANIE DICKENS, FUNDRAISING OFFICER, HEADWAY

mister wim



tessa metcalfe



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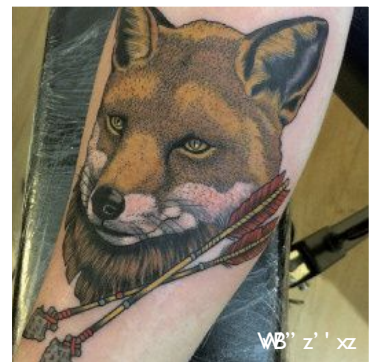
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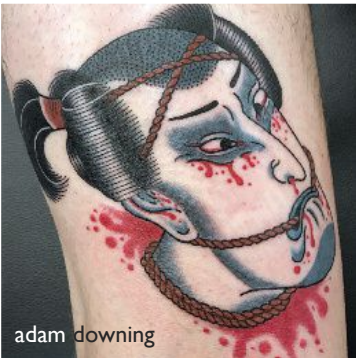
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Hello again dear readers. Welcome to another tale from The Naughty Step.

Have you ever heard a tattooist say something like this to a client?

“You should stick with the classics. They’re proven styles.”

“The bold will hold.”

“It’ll never heal.”

“But what will it look like in ten years’ time?”

Doing the kind of work I do, I hear this kind of thing a lot. And I mean A LOT.

Cheap criticisms like these have long been an easy out for ‘artists’ who actually have no interest in the progress of tattooing as an art form. It’s far easier to plant that kind of doubt in a client’s mind, and talk them into having some tired old design (one that’s been done a thousand times and long since lost its relevance), than be an artist who pushes the artform forward.

And these are criticisms that have been levelled at every new style of modern tattooing since... well, for ever. You’ll have no doubt seen the “It’ll never heal” comment aimed at colour realism all over the interweb by people who are in no way qualified to critique work done by some of the best artists tattooing has ever seen, EVER. Can you imagine a world where the same criticism is levelled at black and grey? Seems impossible right? Wrong! That’s exactly what happened in the 1970s. Incredible as it may seem, back then you’d struggle to get a black and grey tattoo

unless you were in a prison in East LA. Get your hands on a copy of the brilliant film ‘Tattoo Nation’ for a great insight into the birth of black and grey. Then you’ll see how ‘artists’ viewed this staple of contemporary tattooing in its early days.

What is considered traditional is really just a matter of longevity. Some artists will always look to history for inspiration, and some will look to the future to see what is possible. That’s just human nature. Two different, perfectly normal mindsets. But now that tattooing is big business, the arguments that the traditionalists have always used (in an effort to maintain the culture, quality and ethics of tattooing) seem somehow to have congealed into a poisonous agenda for a few jealous small-minded people out there, serving only to hold tattooing back and keep it down. If we only look backwards, tattooing will never progress beyond the point where it was deemed to be ‘traditional’. Its styles, tools and techniques will be locked in time forever; and its iconography will have less and less relevance.

In fact the artists responsible for creating and defining the styles that we now consider to be ‘traditional’ weren’t traditionalist at all. Far from it! They were mavericks and pioneers. If a technique didn’t exist, they created it. If the tools weren’t good enough, they improved them. If the supplies didn’t cut it, they made their own.

They’re responsible for almost everything we take for granted in modern tattooing. They defied the establishment, and simple defiance is sometimes all we have as a means of pushing things forward.

“But mine is a proven style...” Yeah – but not proven by you though, was it. An originator is a different animal to a copycat. The originator invents and discovers techniques. Refining them as he goes until they’re perfect. But the copycat just does it the way he was told. Right or wrong, and without ever questioning if the information was even correct in the first place. By hiding behind the hard work of the originators and claiming that because THEIR work held up, YOURS will too, you are at best fooling yourself and at worst lying to clients. You’re standing on the shoulders of giants to achieve your ‘success’. Holding tattooing back because you can’t move forward.

As always, these are of course my own very personal views. Email me and let me know yours.

**Until next time - Paul
talesfromthenaughtystep@gmail.com**

CONVENTION CALENDAR

UK CONVENTIONS

14th-15th October---

Halloween Tattoo Bash

Wolverhampton Racecourse
Gorsebrook Rd, Wolverhampton, WV6 0PE
www.halloweentattoobash.co.uk

21st-22nd October

Epidermis Tattoo Convention

Westpoint Exeter
Clyst St Mary, Exeter, EX5 1DJ
www.epidermisconvention.com

27th-29th October

Jurassic Coast Tattoo Convention

Premier Inn Hotel Bournemouth Central
Westover Rd, Bournemouth, Dorset, BH1 2BZ
www.facebook.com/jurassiccoasttattooconvention

10th-12th November

East Coast Tattoo Expo

Highfield Holiday Park
London Road, Clacton-On-Sea, Essex,
CO16 9QY
www.eastcoastexpo.co.uk

18th-19th November

Wrexham Tattoo Show

William Aston Hall
Glyndwr University, Mold Rd, Wrexham,
LL11 2AF
www.wrexhamtattooshow.com

OVERSEAS CONVENTIONS

1st-3rd September

Shanghai Tattoo Extreme Expo

Shanghai International Fashion Center
2866 Yangshupu Rd, Yangpu, Shanghai, China
www.tattooextremeexpo.com

15th-17th September

Kaiserstadt Tattoo Expo

Tivoli Eissporthalle
Hubert-Wienen-Straße 8, 52070 Aachen,
Germany
www.kaiserstadt-tattoo-expo-aachen.com

15th-17th September

Montreux Tattoo Convention

Montreux Music & Convention Centre
Av. Claude-Nobs 5, 1820 Montreux,
Switzerland
montreuxtattooconvention.ch

29th September-1st October

Barcelona Tattoo Expo

Fira Barcelona Montjuïc
Avinguda Reina Maria Cristina 1, 08004
Barcelona, Spain
www.barcelonatattooexpo.com

1st-2nd October

International Builders and Tattoo Industry Expo

The BOX
Mekongweg 5, 1043 AE Amsterdam,
Netherlands
www.facebook.com/BUILDERSTATTOOindustryExpo/

6th-8th October

Monster Ink Tattoo Fest

Evenementenhal Venray
De Voorde 30, 5807 EZ Venray, Netherlands
www.monsterinktattooofest.com

13th-15th October

Portland Tattoo Expo

Portland Expo Center
2060 N Marine Dr, Portland, OR 97217, USA
www.portlandtattooexpo.com

21st-22nd October

Wild Atlantic Tattoo Show

West Cork Hotel
Ilen Street, Skibbereen, Co Cork, Ireland
www.facebook.com/wildatlantictattoooshow

20th-22nd October 2017

Evian Tattoo Show

Palais des Congrès d'Évian-les-Bains
Place Peintre Charles Cottet, 74500 Évian-Les-Bains, France
www.evian.tattoo

20th-22nd October

Bay Area Tattoo Convention

SFO Hyatt Regency
1333 Old Bayshore Hwy, Burlingame, CA
94010, USA
www.bayareatattooconvention.com

27th-29th October

Rites Of Passage

Royal Hall of Industries

1 Driver Ave, Moore Park NSW 2021, Australia
www.thetattooofestival.com

3rd-5th November

Florence Tattoo Convention

Fortezza Da Basso
Viale Filippo Strozzi 1, 50129 Florence, Italy
www.florenceconvention.com

4th-5th November

Eindhoven Tattoo Convention

Steentjeskerk
St. Antoniusstraat 5-7, Eindhoven, Netherlands
eindhoven.unitedconventions.com

10th-12th November

Brussels International Tattoo Convention

Tour & Taxis
Avenue du Port 86, 1000 Brussels, Belgium
www.brusselstattooconvention.be

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